School of Theology at Claremont
1001 1366341

WHAT IS HELL?

Theology Library

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT
California

From the library of

DONALD JARMAN

WHAT IS HELL?

BT
834
W4

WHAT IS HELL ?

by

DEAN W. R. INGE
SIR OLIVER LODGE
ABBOT BUTLER
WARWICK DEEPING
J. E. C. WELLDON
JAMES MOFFATT
ANNIE BESANT
SHEILA KAYE-SMITH
W. E. ORCHARD
F. W. NORWOOD
G. HAY MORGAN
IRWIN EDMAN

Harper & Brothers Publishers
New York and London
1930

WHAT IS HELL?

COPYRIGHT, 1930, BY HARPER & BROTHERS

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

FIRST EDITION

A–E

WHAT WE MEAN BY HELL

By

DEAN W. R. INGE

A10776

School of Theology

WHAT WE MEAN BY HELL

By

DEAN W. R. INGE

WE MAY usefully distinguish, though we cannot entirely separate, the two grounds which, historically, have led mankind to believe in a future life. The first of these is the whole body of beliefs and fancies which have their source in primitive animism. The second is the type of beliefs which arise out of the ethical demand for righteousness or justice in the administration of the world by its Creator. To the first belong those ideas which the contemplation of the mystery of death, the phenomena of dreams, and the observation of the recreative forces of nature, quicken into activity. To the second belong all the tendencies to call a new world into existence to redress the balance of the old.

The beliefs which rest on animism naturally lead to pictures of a shadowy existence in the land of spirits, a world like Homer's Hades, in which the "strengthless heads of the dead" wander disconsolately, and crave even for the lot of a serf in the upper air. This was the prevailing belief among those of the Greeks who thought of a future life at all. Only a few notable

criminals were to expiate their flagrant impieties by torment. But among educated Athenians, as we see from Glaucon's answer to a question of Socrates, the belief in survival was very faint, except indeed among those—and they were numerous—who had come under the influence of Pythagorean and Orphic teaching. The Hebrews also, in their earlier period, were but little actuated by animistic beliefs. Their belief in a future life, when it came, strangely late in the history of so religious a race, was hardly even historically continuous with animism. It belonged to the second type of eschatological beliefs. It was the last answer to the persistent question which dominates all the thought of the Old Testament: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" How many other theories of theodicy were tried by earlier seekers, and rejected as incompatible with the observed facts, all readers of the Bible know. The final conviction of the Jews was that since God is just, and since justice is not done here, there must be another life in which it is well with the righteous and ill with the wicked. When the apocalyptists succeed to the function of the prophets, belief in a future judgment is firmly established.

This type of belief in survival is to a very large extent created by the demand for retributive justice, which as time went on became less racial and more individual. This demand postulates a very different kind of survival from that which is pictured by ani-

mism. The person who is rewarded or punished for his deeds while on earth must be beyond question the same individual whose temporal life pleased or displeased his Creator. He must be raised from the dead with whatever organs are necessary to enjoy or to suffer, and, since the idea of strict retribution is at the root of the belief, the enjoyments must be at least analogous to those of which he was unjustly deprived in this world, and the pains must resemble those which it was his main object to avoid at all costs. So the ethical demand for a future life tends to take a materialistic form. It is interested, not in the immortality of the soul, but in the resuscitation of the individual as we knew him on earth.

In early times there was little in men's experience of arbitrary government to make them shrink from the idea of disproportionate rewards and penalties. Moreover, the practical value of religion, as many people think even now, was to reinforce the natural sanctions of morality by supernatural bribes and threats. Eschatology provided priests with their chief source of influence and gain, and was a valuable support of social order and private morality. But since unquestioning belief in future retribution was rare, especially among those whose conduct left most to be desired, there was a strong temptation to paint the joys of the saved and the miseries of the lost in the strongest and coarsest colours, so as to compensate for the

uncertainty of the great assize by the terrific consequences if it should turn out to be true. Churches have seldom been able to resist the temptation to bribe and terrify the irreligious, who are not amenable to any genuinely religious influences. Lurid descriptions of future torment are found in Hellenic Orphism, in the Jewish apocalypses, and nowhere in greater detail than in the literature of Catholicized Buddhism. (*Cf.* Hasting's "Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics," Article "Cosmology.") Virgil's Inferno is a composite picture, put together from different sources.

Christian eschatology has been, almost from the very first, a mass of uncertainties and contradictions. Christ himself revealed hardly anything on the subject. He accepts the language and ideas of His contemporaries, using the words Gehenna and Hades, the familiar figures of the fire and the worm, and narrating two parables, which do not profess to be more than parables, about the judgment to come. In the parable of the Sheep and the Goats, mankind is divided into two classes, the saved and the lost. They are classified mainly by the acts of charity and kindness which they have done or left undone on earth. The doom of the rejected is explicitly stated to be "eternal punishment." (No sound Greek scholar can pretend that αἰώνιος means anything less than "eternal." It is the adjective formed from αἰών, the regular word for "eternity," which the ancients derived from τὸ ἀεὶ ὄν, "that

which always is.") In the parable of Dives and Lazarus, the rich man, whose only faults were a life of selfish luxury and indifference to the sufferings of the poor at his gate, is "tormented in this flame," and the punishment seems to be purely retributive, although the last judgment has not yet come, and the criminal shows at least that he is not without family affection. There is no hint that the rich man is only in Purgatory.

Our Lord's words about the nature of future punishment follow the current tradition of Judaism, and need not be taken literally. But we have no right to ignore or to twist His perfectly plain language about its duration. "Hell" is for Him the place of final reprobation (Matt. v. 22, 29; viii. 12; x. 15; and especially xii. 32, "it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world nor in that which is to come," with Mark iii. 29). Baron von Hügel is perfectly right in saying that if we follow the New Testament "the essence of hell lies assuredly, above all, in its unendingness"; and that if we follow the popular modern teaching on the subject, we must "treat as a barbarous, impertinent irruption into our superior insight and humanity, not only the applications and details, but the very substance, of the convictions of Tertullian, Augustine and Dante."

In St. Paul's epistles we find already the contending and ultimately irreconcilable ideas of a speedy return of Christ to earth as Messiah and Judge (Jewish

apocalyptism), of the soul winning its birthright of immortality by living, while here on earth, in the "unseen eternal" world (Platonism), and of the discarnate spirit being "clothed" with a "spiritual body," not of flesh and blood. It has been supposed that he believed in a resurrection of the righteous only, the doom of the lost being not torment but annihilation. This idea, which is becoming popular among humanitarians, was certainly not strange to antiquity. Edersheim says that it became the favourite Rabbinical doctrine in the second century of our era. It is much the same as conditional immortality, which has found advocates within Christianity from time to time. But it is most unlikely that St. Paul held it, since it is plainly incompatible with the Gospels, and therefore with the beliefs of the Christian Church in his time.

It is not necessary to expatiate on the ghastly pictures of Hell which filled Christian literature, Protestant as well as Catholic, till within living memory. It may be that the morbid dreams of ascetics, which were taken for authentic visions, encouraged beliefs which the gloomy fancies of the Dark Ages, and the sinister ambitions of the priesthood, were too ready to accept and disseminate. When we remember the character of God the Father as revealed to mankind by and in Christ, the blasphemy of regarding Him as an implacable and ferocious torturer seems almost incredible, and must remain a heavy reproach against European

Christianity. Perhaps a visit to a medieval prison, like that at the Hague, full of instruments for ingeniously mangling, wrenching, and crushing the human body, may bring home to us the chasm which divides our sentiments from those of our ancestors, even as late as the sixteenth century. The God of Dante is not *much* more cruel than the tyrant Ezzelino, who had many imitators in the Italy of the early Renaissance. And Dante can without hesitation inscribe over the gates of Hell, "Giustizia mosse il mio alto fattore."

The influences which have modified the traditional doctrines about Hell are very diverse, and not all of equal validity. They have not been quite without effect even in the Roman Church, which apparently allows its adherents to say that Hell is probably almost empty, a significant change from St. Thomas Aquinas, who declared that "in order that nothing may be wanting to the happiness of the blessed in Heaven, a perfect view is granted them of the tortures of the damned." But in Protestantism the revolt against tradition has gone much further.

The humanitarian movement has probably been the most important in discrediting the old tradition. John Stuart Mill's famous protest, that we would call no Being good who was not what we mean by good when we apply that word to our fellow-creatures, finds an echo in every modern mind; and we are no longer

shocked by the defiance which followed. "If such a Being can send me to his Hell for not so calling him, to Hell I will go."

But besides the moral revolt against the horrible cruelty of the old eschatology, there is a widespread conviction that the division of all persons into two classes, the saved and the damned, cannot be reconciled with the most elementary justice. The Scotch have a proverb that some are "over-bad for blessing and over-good for banning." We find it difficult to name anyone who is good enough for Heaven or bad enough for Hell. Or if we have met one or two saints and one or two consummate scoundrels, we are convinced at any rate that the vast majority must be arranged in almost infinite gradations between these two extremes. Hence the belief in Purgatory, which is a matter of faith in the Roman Church. Purgatory of course is the abode not of those who are near the border-line and require further probation, but of those who have been accepted in spite of faults which must be purged by long and painful discipline. There is no Scriptural warrant for Purgatory, but the belief greatly diminishes the difficulty of believing that all are destined either to Heaven or to Hell. Modernist Protestantism, though it may be reluctant to admit it, believes in Purgatory, but not in Hell. It relies on such texts as "God willeth all men to be saved," and the promise that "God shall be all in all."

The assumption behind this popular belief is that there is a process in the universe tending towards perfection. It is supposed that evil must ultimately be destroyed, and the Kingdom of God be co-extensive with reality. Even the most sinful of men, it is thought, must share in this upward progress, for God's will is not done so long as any souls remain in rebellion against Him, or shut out from His presence. This meliorist assumption is so deeply rooted in the modern mind that arguments on the other side are not readily listened to. And yet it is certainly not the Christianity of the New Testament. In the New Testament, as von Hügel says, "there is everywhere an affirmation or implication of man's life here below as a choice between immense alternatives with corresponding abiding consequences." If there is any future probation, it is absolutely unknown to us, and we have no right to assume any such thing.

The new doctrine is acceptable to those who have a defective realization of sin, and a reluctance to believe anything so unpleasant as final rejection. They like to think of life as an examination in which nobody will be finally "ploughed." Such a good-natured religion is more opposed to genuine Christianity than the typical modern mind realizes. It is hardly too much to say that Heaven and Hell stand and fall together. Those who refuse to believe in the possibility of final reprobation will usually be found ready to secularize

religion, and to substitute some dream of "a good time coming" for the blessed hope of everlasting life.

But traditional eschatology has been undermined from another side. Modern astronomy has finally destroyed the possibility of believing in a localized Heaven and Hell; and this great change in our outlook leaves us with the alternative of abandoning the belief in survival altogether, or of spiritualizing it almost beyond recognition. The resurrection of the body was to prepare the resuscitated personality for continued existence in space and time, under conditions not violently unlike those which we can picture to ourselves here and now. Hell was one place, Heaven was another. But if even the vast spaces of the galactic system have no room for a Valhalla, resounding with the shout of them that triumph, the song of them that feast, nor yet for a subterranean dungeon, where the devils "keep the tortures of the damned freshly plied," we must accustom ourselves to think of "Heaven" and "Hell" as expressing the extremes of qualitative differences in the spiritual world. "Heaven is first a temper, then a place," says Benjamin Whichcote. We cannot think of it as a place at all, except when we consciously allow ourselves to use pictorial images to aid our imagination. The same, of course, applies to Hell. The whole apparatus of physical enjoyment and physical torment disappears with this change in our conception of the universe.

Philosophy has long protested against the confusion of eternity with mere endlessness. The deepest Christian thinkers have been fully aware of the degradation which the idea of immortality suffers, when it is regarded as a series of moments, snipped off at one end but extending to infinity at the other. However true it may be that the imagination cannot dispense with these spatial and temporal images, we ought to feel their fatal inadequacy. If we obstinately refuse to admit that the old cosmology has gone for ever, and if we continue to pin our faith on notions which belong quite obviously to the old cramped geocentric world of pre-scientific times, we shall find one day that we have built our house upon the sand.

This realization is doubtless disturbing. But it should lead us to a more worthy conception of eternal life than that which the old eschatology presented to us. The religious movement, it has been well said, does not start from immortality. With Christ the Kingdom of God in the heart of men is central, immortality peripheral. Religion has no interest in simple unending existence, no matter of what kind. "This is life eternal, that they should know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

When we have taught ourselves thus to think of Heaven theocentrically, as the atmosphere which those breathe who are "children of God"—a state to which we need not be strangers even while we are still on our probation, we shall feel how impossible, how almost ridiculous it is to believe in Heaven without also believing in its terrible opposite. If Heaven is, or may be, a matter of experience to us while we live here, so unquestionably is Hell. We know that there is a Hell, for we have been there, or very near it. And this Hell, which is where God is not and the Devil is, is not at all like the Modernist Purgatory, where one trains for the next examination—a place with a fine tropical climate, really bracing to the constitution. Such thoughts are cheap and frivolous; the reality is something much more tragic and terrible. It is a discord very far from "harmony not understood"; it is no mere "privation of good," but positive, radical evil, a stage towards nothing except final ruin. It is then that we face the dread alternative, the choice which, so far as we know, is for us endless in its results.

And so at last we begin to understand that the horrible nightmare of Hell has one of its sources in something far less ignoble than we supposed at first. "Hell is the shadow from a soul on fire"; and it is not the greatest sinners who shudder at the thought, but the greatest saints, who know what the loss would be if God turned His face away from them. So they heap

on images of horror, utilizing all they have heard of or can imagine of body torment and misery, and still the reality exceeds all that they can say. Take these images out of their religious context, and they become monstrous and revolting, just as all images of Heaven, when taken out of their religious context, become gross or absurd. But make God central, and our future peripheral, and the violence of the symbolism becomes intelligible. Where we moderns complacently paint grey on grey, the saints have seen blinding light and inky darkness.

I have no wish to revive the use of language which, as I have said already, is dishonouring to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is merciful, and loves His children. But if the superior smile with which the mention of Hell is received by our modern guides is only part of a plan to banish fear from religion, and to paint God as a good-natured and easy-going ruler, it is necessary to protest that this is not the Christian religion. We wrestle not only against flesh and blood, but against more spiritual and intangible and malignant forces of evil. We are to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire. And finally we dare not forget those words of Christ Himself: "Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But fear him who after he hath killed hath power to cast into Hell. Yea, I say unto you, fear him."

THE REALITY OF HELL

By

SIR OLIVER LODGE

THE REALITY OF HELL

By

SIR OLIVER LODGE

IT IS fairly well known that, after long continued investigation, I have come to the conclusion that survival and persistent existence are demonstrated facts. If that conclusion is false, nothing further that I have to say is of much consequence. But if it is true, if human beings do continue to exist, under somewhat modified conditions—still probably in touch with the physical universe but no longer having any constant association with matter and therefore no longer within our sensory ken—then a great many other things naturally follow. Once it is demonstrated that existence is possible out of association with matter, there is every probability that many other grades of being, besides terrestrial humanity, inhabit space. Even on the earth there are many grades of existence. The variety of animal life is astonishing. Human beings also range from high to low; there is a great gulf between the loftiest and the most degraded mind, which nevertheless is spanned by intermediate grades. Still more may this be true in the cosmos generally; and, granting that space has physical properties—as we know it

has—it is only rational to assume that every grade of being exists in space, from the highest imaginable, to the lowest which manages to escape extermination.

If we may assume that the highest state is characterized in general by joy and peace, the lowest may be associated with pain and suffering of an acute and desperate kind. We have no right to admit the possibility of the one without granting the possibility of the other too. Conspicuously, the earth is a sphere where all manner of things are possible, from something that may be called bliss, on the one hand, to dire torment and despair on the other. The world is not a soft or easy place in which torture is impossible. The whole of reality is embodied in existence, and the whole of reality is infinitely comprehensive.

> "For life is not as idle ore,
> But iron dug from central gloom
> And heated hot with burning fears,
> And dipp't in baths of hissing tears,
> And battered by the shocks of doom
> To shape and use."

The greatest poets and dramatists have not hesitated to face life in all its aspects; horror and vice as well as devotion and virtue (witness Titus Andronicus and Cymbeline); and their outlook on life can only cover a part of the whole. There may be lower as

well as higher grades of being, far beyond our imagination. Heaven and hell are significant terms suggestive of contrasting states of being. The instinct of humanity has always been to strive or hope for the one state, and to shrink from or fear the other. As was said of old time, "Fear not them which can only kill the body, but fear him who can cast both body and soul into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him." Taken as it stands, it is an awful warning; and, though, like all phrases, it requires interpretation, it must represent something real and dangerous. If the highest grades of being are to be called heaven, the lowest grades may be called hell. In that sense therefore hell is a reality.

But lower grades of being need not be permanent and unescapable. Everything tends to show that beings may rise in the scale of existence; the whole of evolution has been a demonstration of that. Rise is not essential to evolution, there may be degradation, but there is always the possibility of rise. From any attained grade we may ascend or we may descend. There is nothing static about the universe; it is a constant flux; change is intrinsic in its nature; development can always go on. Hence the idea of everlasting continuance of any one state is contrary to all our experience: there is no such deadly monotony. However low we are, there is always an opportunity or possibility of ascent: no grade so low but what it may be risen from;—perhaps no grade so high but what it can be

fallen from, though that is more doubtful, for there does seem to be a tendency in nature upward. Evolution, with all its ups and downs, does tend towards progress and higher grades of being. Favourable variations persist; unfavourable tend to disappear. Biological doctrine is clear on that point. Evil has elements of self-destruction; good tends towards increase and growth. The process of the suns, from a mere vaporous mistiness to a concrete incandescent globe, sustaining life and mind, activity and beauty, on smaller masses drawn off from it, is only one example of the perennial process—an example which has been forced by familiar circumstances on our attention, and from which we have every right to learn much and to draw deductions. An infinite unending despair is out of harmony with the scheme.

At the same time there must be a desire to rise, some effort on our own part; we shall not be forced upwards. Hence we are unable to say whether there are any creatures so hopelessly low and in so inert a state that they will never rise. It ill behoves us finite beings to speculate about infinity.

What we ordinarily mean by hell is nothing so dismal as that; just as what we ordinarily mean by heaven is not anything beyond imagination supernal. We are told that there may be a kingdom of heaven on earth —an earthly paradise; it is that for which we are bidden to strive and to aspire. So there may be many

higher and lower intermediate states, some of them high enough to be called paradise, others more akin to purgatory; while as for hell—must we not sorrowfully recognize that sometimes we have done our worst towards making a hell on earth? The terms heaven and hell can legitimately be used to signify high and low grades of terrestrial existence; for every such term may have a finite and accessible significance as well as a transcendent connotation. We cannot always be using a term in the extremest sense possible. So when it is said that the wicked shall be turned into hell, it may be a statement simply true when rightly interpreted. Similarly, when it is said that hell is paved with good intentions, it is a useful and needed warning about the futility of mere unacted-upon emotion, mere impulses which evaporate without results.

In this mitigated form, I conceive that a hell awaits the cruel, the selfish, and the thoughtless. Especially I would emphasize the thoughtless; those who have no consideration for others, and ride rough-shod over other people's feelings. Thoughtlessness is a variety of selfishness, and selfishness is a variety of cruelty; while cruelty, in its many forms, is the one detestable vice against which all the powers of good are in rebellion. Real wickedness is not often encountered: the horrible wickedness of Iago is fortunately rare. For villainy such as that no hell can be too fierce: "their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched."

Robust denunciations, and threats of writhing and gnashing of teeth, may in extreme cases be fully justified. On the other hand, human frailty under temptation can be allowed for: doubtless it brings its own punishment, but it may excite pity rather than indignation. At any rate it is not any part of our duty to form harsh judgements or to condemn the weak and foolish. We are too liable to judgement ourselves to be free with our verdict on others. Sins will doubtless be judged by higher powers than our own, powers that may be compassionate because they know all. Full knowledge is not within our reach; charity, in that sense also, may cover a multitude of sins. But the selfish arrogance which ruins another for its own pleasure, thoughtless selfishness which tramples on the weak, exploits the patient, takes advantage of the simple, and tortures the innocent—actions like these with no motive but our own self-satisfaction or aggrandisement—rightly raise burning indignation.

Seldom do we encounter actual viciousness; the commonest kind of selfishness is a thoughtless habit of putting ourselves first and subordinating everything to that. Thoughtlessness can take many apparently trivial forms. A certain amount of it is inevitable and excusable in extreme youth, for children can hardly realize all that is being done for them by their parents and friends: but if allowed to continue, it is very damaging, and will ultimately lead to biting remorse.

That is a form of hell that everybody can understand, and nearly all will have to go through. Who among us can escape the painful twinge of recollection of some thoughtless or intemperate incident, a feeling that it can never be undone, and a hope that in due time it may mercifully be forgotten? The incidents may be trivial, but they are none the less painful when they recur to the memory. Such feelings however are a sign of awakening; they are probably not experienced by perfectly selfish or thoughtless people.

I sometimes think that thoughtlessness is the vice of the age: any amount of trouble can be caused by thoughtless people. Small tradesmen are harassed because well-to-do folk will not pay their bills. The inconsiderateness of otherwise reputable and kindly people in respect of trifling sums is amazing. Prosperity may be very damaging to the character. Extreme poverty is hurtful too, but in a quite different way: well-to-do folk are often thoughtless without any valid excuse. Some people chatter loudly in public; others are congenitally late for appointments. All manner of inconvenience and sometimes distress are caused by thoughtlessness. It is to be hoped that such people will not escape from remorse. Many more serious examples might be thought of; but it is the minor vices which are most common.

For actual and active cruelty we must, strange to say, indict the theologians. At one time they had a

terribly mistaken idea that persecution was their duty, that they could save people's souls by burning their bodies, and they blasphemously called the procedure merciful. Individually an inquisitor may have been a kindly person, as he was in Bernard Shaw's great play *St. Joan*, but as an inquisitor he is a repulsive ingredient in the cosmos. The more we exculpate the individuals, the heavier is the indictment of the system under which they work. The Bishop of Beauvais may not have been so personally humane as Mr. Shaw chooses to dramatize him—at any rate the Church ultimately thought fit to treat him as a scapegoat and throw him to the wolves—but he is condemned by his acts. Still more is that kind of Ecclesiasticism condemned which rendered such acts possible. The bigoted English Chaplain who aided and abetted the atrocity lived to repent in a salutary hell on earth. What right has one human being to persecute another for his beliefs, or inflict torture in the name of religion? Faith cannot be buttressed by such brutal blunderings of blasphemous bigotry: it is work only fit for devils.

Tracts have been written in excuse. It is claimed that the Cardinals were kind to Galileo, in that they did not put him on the rack, but only made him recant, and thereby blasphemously betray his devotion to truth, and falsify his whole intellectual life. That must have been mental torture of the worst description. Exculpations and excuses made for such persecution,

and for all attempts to force our own beliefs on others by either physical or moral torture, can be stigmatized by a phrase, which, though conventionally used, has a literal significance, namely "damned rot." It is a sign of disease, like dry-rot in condemned timbers, and can only be sustained by arguments which, rightly or wrongly, have acquired the title of Jesuitical; though what excuse there can be for associating the name of Jesus with such inhumanities is beyond rational comprehension. Some of his own indignation at Pharisaical self-righteousness has been recorded. "O generation of vipers, how shall ye escape the damnation of hell!" Yes, that is a good human utterance when confronted with cruelty and religious persecution; and we may take it as symbolical of divine wrath. They are words which only one who felt himself in authoritative touch with Majestic Power could dare to employ.

The founder of Christianity is generally recognized as having had more insight than any other of the sons of men; and He did not scruple to speak of a state of outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The universe does not shrink from inflicting pain where it is salutary. There is nothing feeble or shrinking about the cosmos; consequences are inevitable, and punishment severe. The indignation of the Almighty must be terrible.

Yet compassion and loving-kindness to ordinary human frailty is conspicuous. To the weak repentant sinner, paradise this very day; even to Judas, perhaps, forgiveness; to Pilate, sympathy; to the Roman soldiers, compassion. But to Nero and Herod and Caiaphas and all their tribe, the pains of hell. And these must endure until they are purged from their atrocious self-satisfaction, till they obliterate their former selves, and will again to live. Then in the long last even they may crawl free from their infamy, the evil having been burned out of them, and enter into harmony with the rest of creation. Virgil in imagination had visited hell, and he knew.

Why did Dante and Virgil and Homer depict the horrors of an inferno, and write of visits to such a place? Surely it was because, however brightly we may have caught glimpses of heaven, we dare not turn away or blind our eyes to the realities of existence, we must not ignore the possibilities of suffering. Sometimes suffering is seemingly undeserved, like that inflicted by cancer and other diseases of the flesh, and by diseases of the body politic, like famine, pestilence, and war. But our business is to strive against the avoidable evils, and by adequate study and training, by civilized corporate good-will, to find a remedy. We can, if we bend our energies to the task. Already a beginning has been made; self-sacrificing discoverers have done beneficent work. The higher can always

help the lower; and this power of missionary help will continue, however high we may rise. Saints are not lacking, even now: practical religion is full of devoted service. And in other ways, too, help is forthcoming.

Artists can give us the benefit of their more piercing sight, musicians can open the windows of musty dens of drab unloveliness, and poets can impart something of their higher vision. All can tell us something of true beauty. Even evil has its function to perform. Cessation of pain is a joy. Beauty and goodness are things which we value all the more when contrasted with ugliness and evil. Without contrast there would be monotony: all parts of reality have a value and a mission of their own. They are for us to use and not to abuse. Throughout the cosmos law and order reign; only in the trail of mankind are sown the seeds of rebellion and despair.

So it would appear that, after all, hell is largely of our own making. Free will was a direful gift; our activities, for better, for worse, have been set free; we are not coerced. We can ruin our own lives and the lives of others; we can bring pain to our nearest and dearest, and we may have bitterly to repent. Suffering, however, especially vicarious suffering like that of a parent for a prodigal son, has a redemptive influence; a mother's sorrow has sometimes been the means of recalling a vicious youth from the error of his ways.

So it may be in higher spheres also; that is what Christianity teaches; and there seems no hope of escaping from the possibility of vicarious suffering. However high we rise we may be called on, and may willingly consent, to go to the help of those in torment and distress, and to run the risk of maltreatment at the hands of the self-satisfied and the self-righteous. So it was with the highest of the sons of man; He took our nature upon Him, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; nay more, we are told that He descended into hell. No part of human experience was alien to His saving and healing grace. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the Divine goodness for ever.

HELL AND PURGATORY

THE DOCTRINE THEREON OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

By

ABBOT BUTLER

HELL AND PURGATORY

THE DOCTRINE THEREON OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

By

ABBOT BUTLER

I HAVE been asked to make a "reasoned statement" of the teaching of the Catholic Church on Hell and Purgatory. In full strictness Purgatory should be linked with Heaven rather than with Hell, for it constitutes one part of the threefold Church of Christ: the Church Suffering, which along with the Church Triumphant in Heaven and the Church Militant on Earth are embraced in the Communion of Saints, and together make up the Church of Christ. Still the doctrine of Purgatory does throw light on, and in some degree does lessen the difficulties inherent in the doctrine of Hell. With this latter, most difficult of Christian dogmas, we must begin.

It has to be said at the outset that there can be nothing new in a statement of the teaching of the Catholic Church on Hell. There is no room for modern speculations: the doctrine must remain for Catholics substantially in its primitive terrors. I take it I am asked for a "statement" of what the teaching is; not

for a presentation of the theological considerations on which it is based, nor for an attempt to meet or to mitigate the difficulties with which it is encompassed. These difficulties the Catholic thinker feels as acutely as anyone else. That an infinitely good all-powerful God, who loves His Creatures, should create beings fore-knowing that they are going, by misuse of their free will, to plunge themselves into everlasting perdition, and not intervene effectually to save them from such a fate, is surely an idea that staggers and baffles the human mind. It is the problem of evil in its utmost and acutest form; and of the problem of evil no philosophy offers any really satisfying solution. Hell is, in short, a great and an appalling mystery. Christians by their Creed accept many mysteries; and others, be they theists, pantheists, materialists, agnostics, or what not, do not get rid of them.

In speaking of the Catholic teaching on Hell certain presuppositions must be set forth. The Catholic Church holds such fundamental truths as these: Every man has a soul that is a spirit, that will survive death, and will have personal immortality: it will not be absorbed in any pantheistic deity, or in the great ocean of Being, or in "the great unconsciousness"; nor will it ever be annihilated or allowed to sink out of existence: each human soul will exist individually everlastingly, for all eternity. Next, it is the dictate of the religious conscience—not only Christian, but in all

religions that hold the survival of the soul after death, and the dictate, too, of natural ethics—that if our personal existence goes on in the other world, then will "our works follow us"; we shall "be judged according to our works," and rewarded or punished after our merits, good or bad.

There are certain allied questions, matters of theological speculation, that would carry us too far afield, and would be beyond the scope of this article, which is precisely a statement in regard to Hell and Purgatory: such questions would be the case of unbaptized infants, and of those to whom any knowledge of Christianity has not come, or to whom it has never been brought home with a living, vital appeal. On these questions it must suffice to cite words of Pio Nono addressed, in 1863, to the Bishops of Italy: "We know, and you know, that those who labour under invincible ignorance concerning our holy religion, and who carefully keep the natural law and its precepts engraven by God on the hearts of all, and are ready to obey God, and who lead an honest and upright life, can, by the operating power of the divine light and grace, attain to eternal life." [1] This would imply that such as are here in view would have "baptism of desire," implicitly, in that their mind would be to do God's will, so far as they are aware of it. The principle thus

[1] Denzinger's *Enchiridion Symbolorum et Definitionum.*

clearly laid down is an answer to some of the great difficulties as to the possibilities of salvation.

Coming to treat definitely of Hell, we may depart from the logical order, and take first the practical issue: Who go to Hell? And here again the first general principle may be laid down in the words of Pio Nono, carrying on the citation just made: "God who fully sees, searches, and knows the minds, souls, thoughts, and characters of all men, for His goodness and loving-kindness will by no means allow anyone to be punished with everlasting sufferings who has not the guilt of voluntary sin." Here the principle is enunciated, that only for the guilt of wilful sin does anyone go to the Hell of the damned. It is possible to carry the thing a step further. In 1881 a singularly illuminating article appeared in the *Dublin Review* on the Catholic doctrine of Hell, anonymous, but known to be by that fine theologian and eloquent writer, the late Bishop Hedley of Newport, then editor of the *Review*.[1] In it occurs the following striking piece:

"Hell—the true and awful Hell—is for grievous or mortal sin. With Catholics there is no hesitation as to what is meant by mortal sin. It is that complete rejection of God which involves the extinction of

[1] *Dublin Review*, Jan. 1881; "Everlasting Punishment." Anyone really interested in the subject may find therein a presentation, at once enlightened and orthodox, of the theological and philosophical issues at stake.

sanctifying grace, which is the soul's life. It may not be always easy to tell whether this or that act is really a mortal sin. Acts differ, not only objectively, but also subjectively. It would be comparatively easy to distinguish 'mortal' sins if we had only to consider them objectively, apart from the person who commits them. The difficulty is to know whether the personal circumstances of knowledge, advertence, and consent, are such as to impart to the act of aversion from God sufficient completeness to plunge the soul into the darkness of spiritual death. Happily, we are not called upon to do so. But this much is certain—that only mortal sin, true and complete, will deserve Hell. When one considers how much sin is due to ignorance not fully culpable, to sudden gusts of passion which diminish the power of reason, to actual inadvertence of the grievousness of a given act, and to the dimly appreciated connection of act with act—and when one takes into account those turnings of the heart to God, which come at some period or other to most of those, sinners though they may be, who have known God in their youth, we see at once that it is unnecessary to go to extreme lengths in condemning the multitudes to Hell. It must ever be borne in mind then, that everlasting punishment is for what St. Thomas calls 'certa malitia,' determined malice. The God of all justice cannot punish with external exclusion anything else. He must, and will, make every allowance for antecedent passion,

for blindness, for ignorance, for inadvertence. When a human creature, with its eyes open, has turned away from its known Last End, and when death comes and finds that habit or 'set' of the heart existing, then, and then only, is the awful ministry of never-ending retribution called in. Again: That a majority, or even a large proportion, of the race have been cast into the Hell of the damned, or are suffering in more than a negative way, may well be disputed. Think of the heathen in the 'shadow of death,' and the millions in Christian lands who are invincibly ignorant of all but the very first ideas of faith and morality, and we have a very large number indeed whose punishment—or whose banishment rather—will surely be very light. For if there is one thing that is certain it is this—that no one will ever be punished with the positive punishments of the life to come, who has not, with full knowledge and complete consciousness and full consent turned his back upon Almighty God."

So Dr. Hedley.

The firm teaching of Catholic moral theology is here brought out, that for mortal sin the matter must be a grievous offence against God and known at the time to be such; there must be a full act of deliberation; and there must be full consent—a free, deliberate choice. Anything that substantially lessens the "voluntarium," the voluntary character of the mental act, lessens proportionately the gravity of the sin, and

often turns what would be mortal in the abstract into venial in the concrete case. Such things as the chains of inveterate habit, if the sinner be struggling to free himself from them; as early environment; as heredity, will be taken into account. All this has to be left to Almighty God, the "Searcher of hearts"—it is beyond human estimation. But we may take count of the great fulness of Catholic teaching on "the forgiveness of sins." It holds with absolute entireness that no matter what a man's sins may be; no matter how grievous or even monstrous; no matter how many or how often repeated: a true turning of heart and soul to God in genuine sorrow and repentance, with purpose of amendment, and with love, will always find for the sinner the Prodigal's welcome from his Heavenly Father, for "a broken and humbled heart God will never despise."

In speaking of the Catholic teaching on Hell the distinction, too, of sins into mortal and venial must be kept in view. The Catholic Church rejects as horrible what may be called the old Protestant Calvinistic view, that all sin, even the least, is punished with eternal death. But St. Paul, in more than one place, does give lists of sins that exclude from all inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God: murderers, adulterers, fornicators, thieves, extortioners and others. Right reason can accept the belief that those who live and die impenitent in such sins are really excluded from

the enjoyment of God in Heaven. That one who deliberately plans and carries out a murder; or who commits adultery; or who perpetrates a financial fraud and swindle on a gigantic scale, causing wide-spread ruin and misery; or who amasses a great fortune dishonestly or by exploiting workers and grinding the faces of the poor; or who is guilty of other such enormous crimes of inhumanity, should, if he goes on unrepentant and impenitent in evil-doing to the end, be punished in Hell, is surely not repugnant to the moral sense; and all said and done, it is the teaching of the New Testament.

For the fact stands out in the Gospels that Jesus Christ in many ways makes it known that wicked men do go to Hell. And in face of no saying of our Lord, however mysterious it may be, or trying to our human reason, does the Catholic Church say: "This is a hard saying, and who can hear it!" His sentence on the wicked: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire," contains the two elements of the punishment of Hell: the pain of loss, the banishment from God and loss of the Beatific Vision; and the pain of sense, the fire. He often speaks definitely of "hell-fire"—the "hell of unquenchable fire," where "every one shall be salted with fire." There is no need to multiply texts: that Christ holds out hell-fire as the doom of the wicked is a plain fact of the Gospel narrative, that cannot be escaped from by any reasonable exegesis. The

very least that can be said is that He used the word "fire" as the symbol that best brings home to us the punishment of the damned. The Catholic Church goes beyond any merely symbolical interpretation: though there never has been any formal definition concerning the fire of Hell, still, in view of the general agreement of fathers and theologians, it would be at least "rash" to question the reality of the fire, not necessarily a material fire, or a fire like ours, but an external agent that plays on spirits—"the fire prepared for the devil and his angels," spirits—in a way analogous to that in which fire plays on bodies. This is what is called "the pain of sense," or of feeling; but though usually put in the fore-front as the one most easily grasped by the imagination, and therefore the most efficaciously deterrent in its appeal, still it is but secondary or supplementary. The real substantial punishment and pain of Hell is "the pain of loss." The real substantial joy of Heaven is the Beatific Vision, the seeing God "face to face," and knowing Him "even as we are known"; this is explained as the direct intuitive sight of the Divine Essence, the supreme and perfect satisfaction and joy of intellect and will. This is Heaven; and it is perhaps worth noting that in transcendentalwise it embraces the ideas alike of Plato and of Aristotle as to wherein lies the supreme happiness of man. And so the essential pain of Hell lies in the sentence, "Depart from me," the exile

for ever from the Beatific Vision, now well understood; the banishment from God into "the outer darkness"; the realization of "destruction and perdition," of "eternal destruction," to use St. Paul's words; of utter hopeless failure, of ruin, of calamity irretrievable; in a word, of the *loss* of the soul; with the abiding sense of the folly of it, and remorse, despair, "weeping and gnashing of teeth." It is all very terrible and very mysterious. We know little of Heaven—"eye hath not seen, nor ear heard"; and we know as little of Hell. But the two truths stand out facing each other in the Gospels and throughout the New Testament; and therefore the Catholic Church can no more tolerate any explaining away of Hell than she could tolerate an explaining away of Heaven. In truth, the real crux of Hell is its eternity. That sin, unrepented of, should be punished proportionately to its gravity, is an idea that commends itself to all sense of justice and right. It is the eternity that appalls. Yet the Catholic Church holds that it must be accepted as the plain teaching of Christ, the punishment of the wicked being as everlasting as the life of the blessed. Even were the pain of sense mitigated or remitted, the pain of loss would go on, for it is the deprivation of the Beatific Vision, implied in the "Depart from me." Eternity is an idea almost wholly beyond our grasp; but it does not mean time prolonged *ad infinitum*. It does mean that the lot of the lost is irremediable.

There are ideas nowadays widely current, the result largely of credence given to utterances of mediums, that final judgment is not passed at death, but the time of probation continues in the other world, so that it is possible there to put right whatever may have been done amiss in life, even crimes unrepented of at death. There has also long been the idea that Hell does not begin until the Day of Last Judgment. Against all this the Catholic Church teaches, in accordance with the definitions of the General Councils of Lyons (II) and Florence, that "the souls of those who die in actual mortal sin go down straightway (*mox*) to Hell"—all postponement, further probation, second chances, or possibility of meriting, being shut out.

Though, as was said at the beginning, Purgatory is allied rather with Heaven than with Hell, still Purgatory does lessen for Catholics many of the difficulties that encompass Hell. Indeed, outside the Catholic Church the tendency nowadays is to give up Hell and substitute Purgatory, it being little or no difficulty for any Christian believer that sin should be punished condignly in the next world, if only the punishment at long last come to an end, and the soul, its sins expiated, pass into the presence and enjoyment of God. The Catholic Church cannot accept this idea of Purgatory in place of Hell. She holds firmly both doctrines. Purgatory is in itself a doctrine so eminently reasonable, and so conformable to elementary

ethical and religious notions, that its vehement rejection by Protestantism is hard to understand. It was due no doubt, in part, to the crude shapes in which it has been expressed and pictured.

Concerning Purgatory the Catholic Church has authoritatively laid down very little. The Council of Trent defined no more than that Purgatory exists, and that the souls there detained are helped by the prayers of the Faithful and by the Sacrifice of the Mass; and a warning is added against curiosity and superstition in sermons. Earlier Councils, as those of Lyons and Florence in formulæ for the reunion of the Greeks, lay down hardly more: those penitent, who die in God's love before, by fruits meet for repentance, they have satisfied for their sins of commission and omission, their souls are purged after death by purgatorial punishments; and for the relief of these punishments the prayers of the Faithful still living avail. The series of references in Denzinger's *Enchiridion* to the official authoritative utterances of Popes and Councils relative to Purgatory, speak only of the "pains" or "punishments" (*poenae*) of Purgatory, but say nothing as to their kind, and never make mention of "fire." This reserve of Holy Church is in strange contrast with the exuberance of popular preaching, and even of theological speculation (as found in Dante).

Certain great ethical and religious problems find a solution in the doctrine of Purgatory. For instance,

the problem of death-bed repentances. The case of the Good Thief tells us that there are cases when the turning to God in the presence of death is so real and so entire, accompanied by such heart-felt repentance and sorrow, such desire of amendment, such fervent love of God, that often we may well hope and believe it puts the sinner so effectively in the friendship and grace of God that his sins are fully blotted out, and his soul so filled with sanctifying grace as to be made fit for the presence and the vision of God. But it is not always so: those whose duty it is to assist sinners at death and help them to meet the Just Judge, know that often a death-bed repentance is, to our seeming, an unsatisfactory patch-up. We know, indeed, that the God of Mercies, who "wills not the death of the sinner, but rather that he be converted and alive," will be satisfied with very little, with the least that is necessary; and He is a God who is mighty to save. But when the conscience has been blurred by long years in sin and neglect, and the religious sense has grown feeble, and the faculties are dulled in the clutch of death and can hardly make intelligent acts, and there is no possibility of atoning for an evil life, and unlawful pleasures are given up only when it is no longer possible to enjoy them: well, the priest knows that the Sacraments are intended to meet such cases; but moral justice and the religious sense seem to demand some rectification, some blending of justice

with mercy. Something is needed before one—who has put off repentance till the eleventh hour, and has perhaps gone on sinning on the strength of a death-bed repentance, however repentant he may try to be—can be fit for the Kingdom of Heaven. For "God is not mocked." In such cases as this Purgatory does set right the balance, does satisfy the claims of justice along with mercy, does meet the instinctive judgment of our ethical sense, which, after all, is engraven on our heart by God.

There are two aspects of Purgatory, two things it does for us: Expiation and Purification. The principle of Expiation is that even after the guilt of the eternal punishment due to mortal sin has been remitted by God on sincere repentance, a measure of temporal punishment remains to be undergone in this life or in the next. And not only for mortal sins, but also for venial sins and for lesser imperfections, has some chastizement to be undergone. We are warned by our Lord that for every idle word shall we have to give an account at the judgment. This aspect of Purgatory is contained in the decree of the Council of Florence, just cited, and in a canon of Trent (No. 30 on Justification). The idea of punishment even after forgiveness is entirely conformable to ethical instinct and to experience; it has its warrant in the Bible (notably the case of David); and it seems implied in Christ's reference to the prison whence one will be released when,

but not till, the last farthing has been paid. This then is the first aspect of Purgatory's Expiation, the undergoing punishment for a time for sins not sufficiently expiated in this life. And so in Purgatory satisfaction is made for mortal sins repented of and forgiven, and for venial sins repented of inadequately, or perhaps not at all, and for which fruits meet for repentance have not been brought forth in this life.

Then there is the other aspect of Purgatory implied in the very name—a purging of purification, or cleansing (the Council of Lyons uses the term "cathartic"). It is our everyday experience that even the best people, living good, earnest, devoted Christian lives, still are liable to innumerable lesser sins, faults, failings: as ill-temper, vanity, touchiness, unkind words and acts, suspicions, jealousies, innumerable fallings-short of the Christian standard. We perceive all this as we look around us; and we perceive it much better when we look inwards into our own heart and soul and consider all the unworthy, unlovely thoughts, emotions, desires that so often find a home within us. Everyone but the self-righteous hypocrite must be deeply aware that the beauty of his soul is marred, disfigured, tarnished by a crowd of imperfections, sins, which we are ashamed to acknowledge to ourselves, and which we would not have made manifest for worlds; which yet we trust are not of such gravity and malice as to entail everlasting death in Hell. So

every soul must feel that it is not yet fit to stand in the presence of the all-holy God, whose "eyes are too pure to behold evil," and to look Him face to face in the Beatific Vision: everyone must feel the need of some process of purification to make him fit for Heaven, where "nothing defiled can enter."

This is the aspect of Purgatory developed with great power and beauty in St. Catherine of Genoa's tractate. She claims that it was made known to her by God. The Church authenticates no private revelations; but she has pronounced this account to be conformable to Catholic teaching, and such as may be accepted at will; in fact, it is widely accepted, and has become the most authoritative expression of Catholic ideas on Purgatory. It may be said in general to be the idea underlying Newman's "Dream of Gerontius."

It may be summed up: the soul that passes from the body in the grace of friendship of God is straightway brought into the presence of God, and sees at once God's infinite holiness and purity; she realizes also fully her own deformity and her unfitness to stand before God's eyes. And realizing this, and knowing that the condition of her union with God—which she now desires intensely with a longing, yearning love—is that she be purged and purified wholly from all stain of sin even the least, of her own accord she passes into Purgatory. St. Catherine's conception of the process of purification is the refining of gold by fire; the

rust and dross that cover, and tarnish, and spoil the purity of the soul are gradually burned out until the last speck is gone and the pure metal is freed from all alloy. And the fire is the fire of God's love. The pain of Purgatory is the pain of separation from the Object now so wholly, so keenly, so ardently loved and longed for. And this longing is the cause at once of intensest suffering and intensest joy. The suffering of a soul in Purgatory is greater than any suffering, save that of Hell; and at the same time, its joy is greater than any joy, save that of Heaven. This sounds poetical paradox. Yet it can be paralleled by the experience of this life. For lovers, for husband and wife in enforced separation, the longing desire for union is at once the most poignant pain, but also the greatest joy of life: for nothing would they be without that pain at the price of that joy. So, only greatly raised in intensity, is the mingling of suffering and happiness in the souls in Purgatory. And as the refining goes on and the dross is burned out, God's face shines clearer and clearer on the soul until, when the purging is complete, God transforms the soul and takes full possession of her, and holds her in the same fire for ever, the Fire of His Love.

It is surely a beautiful, and a dignified, and an elevated, and a spiritual, and a truly religious conception, conformable to Christian ideals and to natural ethical sense. The pity of it, that this Catholic teaching on the

Intermediate state should be given up for the strange, unworthy, utterly banal revelations of the mediums about the abodes of spirits in the other world.

And here, with such a Purgatory as this, fits in the Catholic practice—the human instinct, it may be said—of praying for the Departed, that is now reasserting itself with overmastering power: the belief that the process of purification and atonement may be alleviated, shortened, by the prayers and good offices of those on earth, of the Church Militant, in behalf of their brethren and dear ones now members of the Church Suffering—that "unto all who rest in Christ God may grant a place of refreshment, light, and peace" (Canon of the Roman Mass, and the like in all the Liturgies of West and East).

This article is confined to a statement of Catholic belief, without attempt to prove it; still a word may be said in answer to the query whether Purgatory be a primitive Christian belief? Yes; for praying for the Dead implies the belief that they may be helped, their condition bettered, by our prayers: and this again implies an intermediate state, neither Heaven nor Hell, wherein they undergo a progressive process of expiation or purification, or both. But it is recognized now by independent scholars that prayer for the Dead was a very early, even primitive Christian practice (see articles "Prayers for the Dead," "Purgatory," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*; or "State of the Dead" [Chris-

tian] in Hastings' *Dictionary of Ethics and Religion*: this last a quite excellent treatment of the whole subject matter of this article).

A pithy sentence of St. Augustine expresses the idea at the root of Purgatory doctrine: "The lives of many men are such that at death they are not bad enough for Hell, nor yet good enough for Heaven; such may be helped after death by the oblations and prayers offered for them by the living."

HELL AS MAN'S CONSCIOUSNESS OF FAILURE

By

WARWICK DEEPING

HELL AS MAN'S CONSCIOUSNESS OF FAILURE

By

WARWICK DEEPING

IT HAS been said that, "Man, having created God after his own image, was perforce compelled to create a heaven for himself and a hell for his dear neighbour."

For if one asks what manner of hell Pithecanthropus Erectus or Piltdown Man would have created, had either of these creatures been capable of conceiving Hell or Heaven—one realizes the relativity of the conception.

Man creates to his own measure, to the level of the platform of his own progress, and it would be possible to speak of a Stone Age Hell, of a Bronze Age Hell, of the Hell of the Middle Ages, of the Hell of the Now and To-morrow. For man's conception of God, and of God's ordering of life, has rarely been a pure conception. Man has always been a masterful creature, and whether one regards him as the chance production of blind forces, or a creature willed and created, the masterfulness in man has to be accepted.

Whence came the conception of Hell? If God, to

begin with, was the product of fear, of a primitive perplexity, a deity of wrath and war and lightning and catastrophe, and if God grew with man's growing consciousness into a being of love, and of sprouting corn and husbandry, so Heaven and Hell grew likewise. The conception changes as man changes, as his awareness of life becomes subtilized. The hell of the mystic is not the hell of the sensualist.

Psychologists might discover in the conception of Hell the manifestations of the inferiority complex. Hell was the little man's opportunity for getting even with his bigger brother. For man, observing the inequalities of life, its arrogance and agony, its riches and poverty, set out like the ingenious little egoist that he is, to try and level things out. The Greek might conceive reincarnation. To the Christian, poor man and slave, with his self-conscious exalting of humanity and poverty, it would seem natural to postulate a future life in which the fortunes of this life would be reversed. The rich and haughty should frizzle in torment, and Lazarus lie in Abraham's bosom.

But taking the mediæval conception of Hell one realizes its potency, its priest-craft. It was a conception of power. It was used to coerce and to dominate. Its red fire could be displayed to the credulous. Into it could be pitchforked the refractory and the argumentative, those troublesome people who had vision, and who asked questions. Hell was the crucible in which

an established cult melted down contradiction. It was the hell of coercion.

But always man is a little better than his hell. He evolves, and his hell evolves with him. Coercion may go out of favour. The "I" in man insists on other realizations. Though man is multitudinous, Christ and Karl Marx can be found in the same generation; also a Buddha and a Lenin. Russia may make its own red hell on earth, while other mysteries are getting other glimpses of other heavens. Sensual man is sensual man; and mystic man is mystic man. To the seer Hell becomes personal.

Now, I take it that in spite of the decay of the churches and of organized religion, the mass of men still retains a vague, intuitive faith in a life after the death of the body. Incurably and intuitively we are immortals. Setting aside for a moment the evidence offered by the spirits, man has no sensible proofs. All the observations of contemporary science, and his own experiences, are destructive of the conception of another life. Man may be said to have no more than "a feeling" about immortality. Or he may take his stand, and after considering the marvels of life, its order and sequences, exclaim with Butler, "What rot! There must be cunning in it. It can't be mere blind chance."

This age has been called an age of materialism. I doubt it. I have a feeling that this age is accumulating

an immense, inward urge towards spiritual things. We are living in a period of disillusionment, but this mood of discouragement will pass. Man may not label himself Christian, but I believe he is nearer to Christ than were most of his forefathers. For the average, contemporary man is beyond doubt kinder, cleaner, more humane than the man of any previous century.

But to return to the conception of Hell. The hell of the priests has passed. Man is his own priest, and his heavens and his hells are personal. They are in the now and in the nearby future. Man in his mass movements may appear to be tending towards a material conception of life. His cry may be, "The social millennium in our time." He may seem to be led like the eternal ass by a bunch of golden carrots. The golden age of the socialists. It may come, and man may find it an age of brass, and having lived through it and savoured it, will shrug his spiritual shoulders and set out again on the road toward mystery. He will have passed by another illusion.

For what is Hell for the wise man but the realization of his own failure?

Failures are various, and the hells of inward grieving and remorse are as various.

To fail! But what is failure? In a commercial age it is almost synonymous with lack of success in the accumulation of wealth. And what is wealth? The political economists have always struck me as being

perplexing and purblind people. The old Midas fable is as significant as ever. A rich man may be the most gloomy of failures, his house of success plastered with dead plates of gold. Your working man might express the poignancy of failure by saying: "That he was out of work and without a bob for the Saturday football match." Material things are so relative.

But the soul of man is otherwise. Once again we dare to speak of souls. We may dare to speak of the soul of a stone or of a flower. And Hell is the shadow overhanging a man's soul. It is the shadow of failure, of defeat, of a loss of faith in his essential, inevitable self. It is consciousness of sin, and sin is a reality. The sense of sin is a reality. I cannot see it as a mere offence against the herd instinct or the crowd convention. I see it as a part of man's individual, personal consciousness. For man is "I." He will become more and more "I," while growing more and more conscious of the "I" in his neighbour. As he develops he lives more and more in the world of his own expanding consciousness, as the artist and the poet and the scientist live. Consciousness is like a light spreading further and further over the seeming darkness of objective things. Consciousness may be Heaven or Hell.

For we see that which we deserve to see, and feel that which we desire to feel. We are the illuminants or the crusted hogs. Nothing is more certain and sol-

emn and tragic than this. We may bury our heads in books upon heredity and environment, and argue and object; but the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children, and the blind are leaders of the blind. They fall into Hell and wander and wail, and accuse the politicians and the rich. How often does a man in Hell point the finger of judgment at himself?

Life is so much a personal affair. And in thinking and striving and erring and suffering one comes through the years to a knowledge of the great verities, to the things that matter. They matter, and they matter supremely. No man is blessed till he has come to know how he may be blasted, and has climbed above that self-made fate.

I think my own picture of Hell is that of a lonely old man standing on the edge of the unknown and looking back at his past. The past is a great space full of memories, and in that space all the memories are dark and sinister. Hardly a hill or a building or a tree catches the light. He looks back upon failure. But upon what kind of failure?

He has failed people. He has failed those who tried to love him. He has hurt and made unhappy those who sought to give him happiness. He has given no happiness, and therefore he has no memories that are happy. He has caused little ones to stumble. He has been a traitor to that one good comrade—his wife. He has piled up the hard stones to build a house of

success for his purblind self, and his house has been nothing but a pile of dead possessions.

For in failing people, in sinning against love, and against the spirit, man fails himself. It is so old and so very simple a truth. And that is my idea of Hell, to stand at the end of your days looking backwards, and seeing nothing but a shameful grey landscape. To see the many occasions when you might have given gladness, and you gave wounds. To remember traitorous false moments. To remember the savage slaver of sex, and never the saving grace of the greater love. To see nothing but a careful, sly, shrewd selfishness. We sin, but sin is not Hell. Sins may be but steps in the great ascent, if we remember our sins, and do not forgive ourselves too easily. It is the broad landscape upon which we look back at the end of our days that should have for us the face of Hell or of Heaven. Has it a brightness, a gentleness, the suffusion of something somehow good, or is it grey and hard and hopeless?

That is my idea of Hell, to stand at the end of one's days and to know that the landscape you have painted is grey, a place of stones, and of the bones of broken memories. Who will deny it? Can any man deny it? I defy any man to deny it. Our little clevernesses will shake at the knees when we come to that last, lonely place and stand looking back.

Hell is to look back at the dim, reproachful faces of those who loved us, those whom we betrayed.

THE NATURE OF PUNISHMENT AFTER DEATH

By

BISHOP J. E. C. WELLDON

THE NATURE OF PUNISHMENT AFTER DEATH

By

BISHOP J. E. C. WELLDON

IF AN answer to this question can be found anywhere, it will be found in the words of Jesus Christ. But His words cannot be literally accepted: they are allegorical or metaphorical. For He spoke of Hell in the language of time and space; but the future life, whatever it may be, will be timeless and spaceless. It is no more possible to think of souls as living after life for a definite or indefinite period of time than to think of them as all ranged side by side before the Judgment Seat on the day of the ultimate Great Assize. Jesus Christ, indeed, even when speaking figuratively, said but little about Hell; yet that little was enough to demonstrate how vitally important is man's present life in relation to his state after death. Nothing could well exceed the solemnity which Jesus Christ attaches to the conduct of the present life in its bearing upon the future life after death.

There are in the New Testament three Greek words which are translated in the Authorized Version by the one English word "Hell." But the word "Hell," which means no more in itself than the "hidden place,"

is generally understood as representative of Gehenna. Gehenna was the Greek equivalent of the Valley of Hinnom, the deep gorge on the south side of Jerusalem, where the refuse of the city was consumed by day and by night incessantly. That is the meaning of the worm that never dies and the fire that is never quenched. It was so that the Valley of Hinnom is in the Talmud called the Door of Hell. Gehenna then, or the Valley of Hinnom, would appear to suggest not that the souls which enter it are perpetually tortured—although never consumed—by fire, whether literal or metaphorical, but that they are soon or late consumed by fire, which is the great purifying agent not only on earth but in the eternal world beyond the grave. So far Gehenna may not unnaturally be supposed to afford a basis for the belief in conditional immortality, or in other words for the belief that, while the souls of the righteous enjoy an eternal felicity, the souls of the wicked after a certain experience of suffering pass into nothingness. Because the future life is in its conditions so distinct from the present, the language in which Jesus Christ refers to it is necessarily indefinite. Neither human intelligence nor human experience is such as would enable men to conceive existence apart from time and space. Yet the simple fact that the future life is timeless is in itself enough to dispel the nightmare of everlasting punishment. To say so is not to say that the punishment which a man endures may

not continue so long as his resistance to the will of God endures, or that the punishment may not be so severe as to merit the awful words of Jesus Christ in relation to the traitor Judas: "It had been good for that man if he had not been born." Christians, who have believed or have thought they believed in the everlastingness of punishment, have probably consoled themselves in the secrecy of their hearts by believing that even in spite of such punishment the love of God would somehow in the end assert and explain itself, if only because the things which are impossible to man are possible to God. It is reasonable, however, in the light of the Christian revelation to suppose that the sentence which will be passed upon guilty sinners is not only penal, but remedial. If Jesus Christ anywhere sheds light upon the effect of punishment after death, he sheds it in the parable of Dives and Lazarus. It is true that the parable represents the rich man as being not in Gehenna but in Hades or, to use the corresponding Hebrew term, in *Sheol*. But his punishment has already, as it seems, exercised an ameliorating influence upon his character. In his lifetime he thought, or acted as though he thought, of nobody but himself; but in Hades, if he thinks first of himself, he thinks also of his brethren. To Abraham he says, "I pray thee, father, that thou wouldst send Lazarus to my father's house: for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come unto this place of tor-

ment." The purgatorial discipline has, in fact, begun its purifying work; and the work so begun may not unnaturally be regarded as issuing soon or late in the rich man's spiritual regeneration.

In the conception of Hell, as also of Heaven, it is necessary to discard the lessons of the present life. The existence beyond the portals of the grave will be such as is wholly independent of material conditions. Christianity indeed inculcates a belief in the resurrection of the body, a belief wholly distinct from the belief in the immortality of the soul. But the body, after its resurrection, or the body of the resurrection as it is called, will be clearly a sublimated, glorified, etherealized body. The narratives of our Lord's Transfiguration and of His appearances in the mysterious forty days between His Resurrection and His Ascension prove His body to have been, in those supreme hours, exempt from the limitations to which all human bodies are necessarily subject. There is no sufficient reason for drawing an argument as to the nature of the body after the resurrection from its nature in the present life.

Whatever Hell may be then, it will be a state not of material but of spiritual penalty. Cardinal Newman, in a well-known passage of the "Dream of Gerontius," has sought to portray the anguish of a soul in purgatory, when it is torn asunder, as it were, by the love and yet the dread of communion with the Incarnate Deity. So the angel says to the soul:

"Thou wilt desire
To slink away, and hide thee from His sight:
And yet wilt have a longing eye to dwell
Within the beauty of His countenance.
And these two pains, so counter and so keen—
The longing for Him when thou seest Him not;
The shame of self at thought of seeing Him—
Will be thy veriest, sharpest purgatory."

Perhaps the argument from purgatory may be carried onwards with greatly augmented emphasis to the state of Hell. It is reasonable to suppose that the soul, emancipated from the bonds of flesh, will attain a clear apprehension of spiritual realities. To souls on earth the vision of God Himself is always obscure, and not seldom doubtful. It is difficult, as Tennyson was fond of saying, to believe, but more difficult not to believe. For the senses afford no revelation of God's essential Being. It is by the spiritual faculty, and that alone, that God, who is the Father of all spirits, can be discerned; and if the soul of man in Hell beholds God in His awfulness without any material intervention, then it will realize, as it never could upon earth, the imperious claim of God upon human affection, the heart-breaking consequence of alienation from Him, and the ineffable reality of the gulf which has been set by its own wilful sinfulness between itself and the God whom it now adores. Similarly, the soul in Hell will

at last understand the mystery of the Incarnation. In the Apocalypse it is the "Lamb as it had been slain," who unseals the volume of the Divine Revelation. How faint and dim a verity appears to human eyes the Incarnation of Jesus Christ! The many theories of sacrifice, atonement, propitiation, redemption, are so many vain endeavours to elucidate the inexplicable truth. But when the soul comes to comprehend the love of which the Cross is the supreme manifestation, and to understand the condescension of the Lord's birth and His life, of His suffering and death, then at last will it realize how terrible has been the issue of the sin by which the soul forfeits, if only for a time, its participation in the blessing which the Saviour won by His anguish for mankind. Yet again the parable of Dives and Lazarus suggests that the pain of Hell will be accentuated by the sight or thought of Heaven. The soul will enter upon the consciousness of its deprivation when it gazes, from however wide a distance, at the beatitude of the redeemed in Heaven; it will understand then what it might have been, and the contrast between its possible peace and its actual distress will be the keenest sting of all its sufferings. Even upon earth there is no more acute pang than that of remorse. Remorse is the agony arising from the sense of a blessing which might once have been achieved and now is forfeited for ever. The words at the close of George Eliot's novel, "Adam Bede," come

into my mind. It is Adam Bede who speaks, and he speaks of poor Hetty Sorrel's seducer, Colonel Donnithorne: "The first thing he said to me, when we'd got hold o' one another's hands, was, 'I could never do anything for her, Adam—she lived long enough for all the suffering—and I'd thought so of the time when I might do something for her. But you told me the truth when you said to me once, "There's a sort of wrong that can never be made up for."' "

So the essence of Hell, if rightly understood, seems to be remorse. But the secret motive of remorse is that sinful actions are seen in their true light. No punishment can be greater or keener than that which a youth may feel when he learns that his heartlessness or his thoughtlessness has killed his mother, or a man that it has killed his wife. It is so that the Cross has excited an inexpressible feeling of pain in human hearts, when it has revealed the true nature of sin by revealing the consequences which soon or late necessarily follow sin.

Punishment in Hell will not be physical suffering in any one of its forms; it will be sustained not by the body but by the spirit or soul; it will consist in an intensely vivid and painful appreciation of facts as they seem to have been and as they are. For the sinner will realize in the invisible world the terrible nature of the discrimination between the good and the evil. He will realize, too, his utter impotency to cancel the effects of the evil which he has wrought by his life

upon earth. Habits are insensibly formed; and when they are formed, it is almost infinitely difficult to change them; and there remains the possibility that the soul, which has offered resistance to the will of God in life, may continue to offer it after death. Our Lord's language respecting the future invisible world must be figuratively understood; but nobody who reads it can mistake the awful solemnity of the relation between the present and the future lives. It is clear that at the Final Judgment the issue depends not upon faith or creed so much as upon conduct, that it is happy or unhappy according as the soul which is judged is said or is not said to have done the will of God, that it involves an abiding distinction between souls, that the souls which win the benediction of the supreme Judge are themselves often, if not always, unconscious of having done anything to deserve it; and that they, who by their own fault or folly have lost the great felicity, are overwhelmed with pain and shame at the thought of the goal which might have been theirs and ought to have been and now can never be.

I do not desire to minimize the awful gravity of Hell. I think there is too much tendency in the present day, among preachers especially, to ignore or forget our Lord's emphatic admonitions. The probation of the present life is undoubtedly relative to eternity. The warnings and the blessings of Jesus Christ may

be said to run on parallel lines which can never meet in this world, but may under the Divine Providence meet, as Christians believe, in the world which is to come. The real Hell is and must remain a mystery. The belief in it, as in all dogmas bearing upon the Divine Nature, or Providence, transcends the range or scope of human thought. To define it therefore in specific language is impossible; for finite minds cannot fathom the reality of the infinite God. But every mystery is a great possibility; every mystery is in itself an incentive not only to speculation but to adoration. Before it, as before the veiled figure of Isis, humanity bows its head in humble reverence. But in every mystery, as in all true religion, the final word is the word of acquiescence in the sovereign power and the sovereign love of God.

HELL AND HELL

By

PROFESSOR JAMES MOFFATT

HELL AND HELL

By

PROFESSOR JAMES MOFFATT

THE request to write upon this subject came to me as I happened to be reading the "Legend of Montrose," reading, indeed, the very chapter in which Captain Dalgetty describes how he consulted a Roman chaplain in the Spanish army as to whether he, Dalgetty, a sturdy Protestant soldier who held the mass "to be an act of blinded papistry and utter idolatry," was justified in attending the said mass as part of his military duty. After a heavy drinking bout Father Fatsides was able to answer the anxious inquirer. He assured the Captain that, "as nearly as he could judge for a heretic like myself, it signified not much whether I went to mass or not, seeing my eternal perdition was signed and sealed at any rate, in respect of my impenitent and obdurate perseverance in my damnable heresy." This is the sort of thing that has done much to discredit belief in Hell. It is mainly the product of the Latin church, for the Catholic tradition, represented by the Orthodox Church of the East, has never elaborated sectarian and private novelties such as the Mediæval Church in Europe evolved. The popular

effect of these novelties has been to make "Hell" a strong term for what is unpleasant in our own lives here, or for the doom hereafter of those whom we dislike on the score of their faith or misdeeds. As a religious conception it has been so vulgarized and misrepresented that most sensible people avoid it, especially as the verbal expressions are bound up with a Semitic cosmogony which is no longer tenable; for we now know how the solemn idea arose in the later Judaism and how it was adopted by primitive Christianity. It is not simply the abuse of the idea by Latin Christianity, but the historical knowledge of its origin and of its limitations as a concept, that repels some modern minds.

A further difficulty is raised by the conditions of argument on such a theme. Father Fatsides and his tribe talk of it in a spirit quite out of keeping with so serious and sombre a topic. To preach or to write about it in a coarse or mocking spirit is to outrage Christianity. No one can approach the subject of what "Hell" means without requiring to be strictly guarded and thoughtful in his statements. To speak of purity purely is not easy; to warn against pride without being sarcastic and scornful, is always a task; and to discuss the fate of the impenitent without becoming light or uncharitable is no less hard. I almost feel that on this score one ought to be content to refer the reader to what has been already written. Why add anything

to one of the wisest words on the whole subject—to Dean R. W. Church's Oxford sermon on "Sin and Judgment"? It is published in his rich volume, *Human Life and its Conditions*, and if people would only read his appeal they would be put in the proper focus for viewing the entire subject of ultimate issues in Christianity.

I say the entire subject. For Hell is not to be isolated from the Christian synthesis. Half of the misunderstandings in theology arise from the habit of taking some topic apart from its context. Hell, if it means anything at all, means something which is for Christianity intelligible only in the light of a larger belief. So much depends on the view taken of survival after death, as well as of evil and sin, that unless some agreement is arrived at on these problems it is useless to discuss what is meant by a term like "Hell." That is the third of the difficulties which present themselves to a modern mind. It is easy to caricature popular misconceptions and to make fun of dogmatic statements, which no longer carry conviction to the intelligence. This is cheap and futile. The vital point is to discover why such an idea became embodied in the faith of the Church, and what it stands for—if it stands for anything. There is nothing more empty than to detach it from its context in the common Catholic faith, and then analyse its content. Such a method is amateurish, however acute and clever it may prove.

If, for example, the whole scheme of Christianity is a subjective impression, due to primitive fears and hopes, and expressed in antiquated terminology, then we might echo Fitzgerald's lines on

> "Heaven but the vision of fulfill'd desire,
> And Hell the shadow from a soul on fire,
> Cast on the darkness into which ourselves
> So late emerged from, shall soon expire."

If "Hell" offends our sentimental ears, then we may welcome a "soft Dean," like Pope's,

> "Who never mentions Hell to ears polite."

But, on the other hand, if the Christian faith as historically presented is substantially valid, if we desire to believe in the faith once delivered to the saints, then the question of sin forces the problem of Hell on the conscience and intelligence. Those who occupy this position may not have any very definite answers to give, but at least they recognize that there is a question to be answered, and to be answered in a deeper sense than facile modernists imagine.

Take the creeds for example. There is only one Hell in the Apostles' Creed. "I believe . . . in Jesus Christ. He descended into Hell." Here Hell means the place of the dead, or, as we say, the underworld,

from which He rose to life on the third day. Whatever this means, it means a real experience, and no other "Hell" became part of the Church's creed at the first.

But there is Hell and Hell. In the common acceptation of the term, the word means the final state of punishment in which sin ends. Is this belief consistent with the Christian faith in a God who is good and loving? Is it a deduction from some Semitic terminology in which the primitive Church expressed its faith, but which is as outworn as the cosmogony of the same Church? Is it so much picture-language, gathering round the original teaching of Jesus and obscuring His gentle message of reconciling love? Are we to discard it as part and parcel of the harsh apostolic tradition which failed to appreciate the message of the Master? The question is one partly of interpretation of the Bible, partly of moral and philosophical significance. On both sides confident and peremptory answers have been given, and are being given. Men have made God's love "too narrow by false limits" of their own, magnifying His strictness and pressing logical conclusions from single Bible phrases into rigid bonds for the life to come. On the other side, it is fair to say that they have made His love too broad, by regarding the sayings of Jesus as exaggerated expressions meant for an unthinking age or as adventitious additions of a secondary generation, and therefore

concluding that as Hell would mean God's failure, all will end well, no matter how men have lived here.

Anything the present writer has to say on the subject is this:

In the first place, it seems impossible to eliminate all the severe sayings of Jesus about the future from the tradition of His teaching. Allow as we may and must for apostolic emphasis, the teaching of Jesus was not an amiable gospel of reconciliation. He taught that man might do things here which would prove their undoing. His gospel was for Him a matter of life or death. He believed that the attitude of men toward Himself as the divine Son and Lord was critical; by that their fate was to be determined. He believed that certain sins such as selfishness and cowardice and flat disobedience to the will of God doomed men to exclusion from the divine Presence for ever. Hell means man's failure, and Jesus never assumed that He would succeed with all. There is an inexorable note in His teaching, which no trustworthy criticism can get rid of; it is organic to His message. The apocalyptic sayings were attributed to Him, when they were attributed, because of a stern, serious element in His message. God is love, but He is not deified good-nature, unless Jesus misread His character.

It is superfluous to develop this. I pass on to offer another observation, namely, that the form of this fate is not defined. Jesus is reserved on many details of

the future on which theology has been profuse and pronounced. In some words, for example, He seems to assume the continued existence of the disobedient. But in others He hints at a different idea. "I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear," He tells the disciples. "Fear Him, which after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear Him." "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both body and soul in Hell." What do such words imply? A God of awful authority, no doubt. But perhaps more than that. The word "immortability" is a horrid expression, as horrid as "altruism," but it means a truth for which there may be more to be said than is often allowed. Is the soul capable of reaching an immortal value, or is it immortal essentially? On the scheme of Christian faith, may it be annihilated? Is personality an undying possession, or is it attained through obedience to the creative will of God alone? The implications of the Christian view of faith are not incompatible with the latter, and it is, I think, a fair question whether the view which is commonly called Conditional Immortality may not gain corroboration in the future. It is contrary to Platonism, but there is not so much evidence against it in the message of Christianity as some appear to take for granted.

The third remark I have to make is this, that the teaching of Jesus about life and its decisiveness is in line with our best moral judgments. The current dislike for the Church's doctrine of Hell has a certain justification in crude and one-sided expressions which have excited proper reprobation. They are due largely to a mediæval inheritance from the Latin Church, and it is only a true interpretation of the Bible which can exorcize them. But the exorcizing leaves a core of faith which may have for its corollary something corresponding to what used to be called "Hell." Those who regard Christianity as no more than a genial gospel of goodwill, or a social programme of betterment in the present order, or a mild scheme of progressive idealism, naturally have no place for Hell in their outlook. If they attend to it at all, it is only as an outworn form of threats about the future once devised to keep people in order here. But when Christianity is taken seriously, and when the Lord Jesus Christ is worshipped, then sin is not to be put by. And the conception of sin has implications. It implies a God who is not vindictive, but who has hatred for evil as well as love for man; it implies a moral significance attaching to the present order of experience which involves final results; it implies also that somehow evil as well as good may take such forms as are permanent—even if, in the case of evil, the permanence be annihilation. Belief in

Hell is an element of any religion which is morally healthy. Like all such vital elements it is capable of abuse, but without it the dominant forces of Christianity cannot be exerted; when it is eliminated, Christianity becomes merely a form of humanitarianism or of religious syncretism, that is to say, untrue to its real self.

This may be criticized as dogmatic. It is not intended to be dogmatic in the sense of oracular or self-assertive. One goes in fear of Bishop Butler's grave warning against "that infinitely absurd supposition that we know the whole of the case." We do not. No one does, not even an undergraduate or a fundamentalist. But if and as we are inside the Catholic Christian faith, we are entitled to say that we do know something of the case—that there are lines laid down by the Lord Jesus gravely and steadily which reach out into the future, and that, so far as we can see, these lines do not end in a pious blur or in a smooth, sentimental harmony. Only, as no one knows how evil arose, no one knows how it will end; although one may reasonably conjecture that as it arose not in God, so it may end outside of Him. And with evil, all who deliberately identify themselves with it.

I hesitate to say more. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"—is the word which haunts the mind as one is writing on such a subject, and try-

ing to write responsibly. Heaven, one might say something about. The true Christian hopes to go there, and he strives to help others here and now to reach it. But Hell? No one desires to go to Hell, much less to push another in the direction of ruin and loss. Yet the paradox is that by incautious words on the subject, either such as may be judged orthodox or unorthodox, one may be doing this very thing.

HELL AS A TRAINING SCHOOL

By

ANNIE BESANT

HELL AS A TRAINING SCHOOL

By

ANNIE BESANT

IT MAY be remembered that Emerson—whose Essays are not as much read by the present generation as by that to which I belong—possessed the only copy of the translation of the now well-known Hindu Scripture, the "Bhagavad Gita" (The Song of the Lord), which had reached America in his day. Those who are familiar with his writings will easily verify the truth of the statement that his general attitude towards life is distinctly coloured by Indian (Hindu) thought.

The special point in which we are now concerned is his view of an action. He regards an action as threefold: the desire—which prompts, gives rise to, the action; the thought—which decides the method of activity to obtain or avoid the desired or undesired object; the act—which appropriates or repels that object. This sequence can always be observed, if an intelligent person analyses the genesis, the method, and the performance of an act. The three stages are summed up in one Sanskrit word, "karma". (This word has come into very general use, and, with one

qualification, that the fact of reincarnation is taken for granted by the Hindu, since the idea belongs to Hindu philosophy, and that without this fact, karma would become a rigid, unchangeable destiny which could not be modified or entirely changed.) The modern Hindu, influenced by the Mussulman "Kismet," is apt to fall into this error and therefore to remain inert in face of that which he regards as inevitable: "It is my karma, what can I do?" Yet the supreme Hindu ideal of duty, Bhishma, gave the ever-to-be-remembered axiom: "Exertion is greater than destiny." The point may be briefly explained, as it shows how a man, who knows the law and applies it, can modify or even destroy the "Real Hell" which he may have created for himself on the other side of death; as it is written: "Wisdom can burn up karma."

I am conscious that people who think that life is not governed by law, but is a matter of "good luck" or "bad luck," may be impatient with the method by the practice of which man becomes "master of his destiny". But everyone is not so unintelligent. Science has proved the inviolability of natural law, but everyone does not realize that a law which gets in one's way can be neutralized by opposing to it another law. Hence the scientist, knowing many laws, can walk in safety among conditions which would maim or kill an ignorant man. It is idle to rail against the realm of law into which we are born; the sensible thing is to learn,

and to become free in that realm by knowledge of its laws. Those who refuse the safety given by knowledge must stumble along life's pathway, tossed from pillar to post and being bruised in the process, while the patient student learns the laws which surround him, and walks happily and safely by observing them. "Nature is conquered by obedience," and the tyrant becomes the servant of the wise.

Now "the law of karma" is divisible into three sub-laws:

(a) Thought creates character.
(b) Desire creates opportunity.
(c) Action towards others creates the reaction of future circumstances on ourselves.

An illustration will show how this works out: Each of two men A and B, gives a public park to his town: A gives it with an unselfish motive—the desire to brighten the lives of the poor; B gives it with a selfish motive—to gain credit for himself as a benefactor and to be rewarded by a title. Both have made the people happier. Both will be surrounded by favourable circumstances in a subsequent life; A will be unselfish and happy in them; B will be selfish and miserable in them. (I may say, for what it is worth, that I have personally traced out such cases.)

Now, how does this affect the Real Hell? Let me

take the usual words Heaven and Hell as meaning, for this discussion, happiness and unhappiness after death, using the two words in their widest sense.

We are creating in our present life our after-death conditions; we carry with us, after we have left the body, the results of the experiences which we have passed through during our lives on earth, as the handicraftsman carries the yarn he has spun to weave into cloth, fine or coarse according to the yarn he has spun; the kind of cloth he weaves depends on the yarn he has spun. His immediate state on the other side of death depends on the character of the life he has led.

There are three worlds through which men pass: the physical world, the world of the body: the passional and emotional world, which works through the physical body and affects it through the involuntary nerves; the mental world, which works through the brain and the cerebro-spinal system of nerves. The emotions, which are passions refined and made relatively permanent by the mind, through both systems.

These are ordinary physical and psychological facts, and the latter having been more fully worked out in eastern than in western psychology, enter largely into "occult" teachings.

Taking first the physical body: the solids, liquids and gases break up in the ordinary fashion of organic bodies; the ethers which permeate these, hold together for a time, while the body decays, hanging round their

more solid companion and not leaving it to any great distance; these sometimes cause knocks or bell-ringing, blundering round, but we can leave these alone as unimportant. The man clothed in his emotional and mental bodies, linked to his ego and spirit, passes into the intermediate world—which the Roman Catholics call Purgatory; there he gradually gets rid of the materials vivified by his sensual and sensuous life. He awakens in this Purgatory after some days, or, if he has lived a clean and wholesome life, after a longer period of unconsciousness, or rather untroubled dream-life, dreaming of those he loves and often in touch with them while they are out of the physical body in sleep, while the coarser physical materials drop away from the subtler, since they have been little vitalized during his life. But if, on the contrary, he has led a life in which he has sought pleasure by yielding often to physical pleasures—sexuality, gluttony, drunkenness—then the exaggerated cravings which he has stimulated by unrestrained yielding to them, persist, and become a very serious torture to him, that gradually lessens by their being starved out by lack of gratification. While these persist, they cause a very real but self-created hell, the inevitable result of his unnatural stimulation of natural passions by unbridled indulgence. Drunkenness again, creates a hell of a similar kind for the drunkard, similarly worn out by its starvation. Similarly with gluttony.

I have found that a quiet description of this condition of a drunkard after death, based on the drunkard's own memory of his sufferings after excesses, appeals very strongly to his sense of the working of a natural law in his own experience; and one adds to it the fact that as the craving has its source in sense-centres of matter subtler than the physical, it is felt as more powerful because it has no longer to spend part of its energy in the moving of heavy matter.

If the special form of vice indulged in includes injury to another, as in the case of commerce with a prostitute, then the moral injury inflicted on the woman is a wrong of a far more far-reaching character, to be made good in a future incarnation by services to be rendered to the victim. Ignorance of these results, in the case of those who do not recognize the law of reincarnation, does not lessen the harm wrought, nor its results.

A life with many blots on it does not mean that it is all blots. There are bright spots in every life—unselfish love, or kindness, or generosity, or sorrow for evil wrought, or efforts to repair wrongs inflicted. These have also their fruit later on, for the Real Hell is a reformatory, not an empty punishment. The ego learns through the sufferings of his vehicles, and the memory of these sufferings preserved in his body, which passes through the cycle of reincarnations, is what we

call conscience. Conscience is the epitome of our experiences, not the "Voice of God." Were it the latter, it would be infallible. Often men perform the most cruel actions at the instigation of very incomplete experience. "I must follow my conscience," said a Puritan to a persecuting Archbishop in the days of the Stuarts. "You are right," said the Archbishop, "you must follow your conscience; but take care that your conscience is not the conscience of a fool."

The Real Hell, then, is the training school for egos —souls—on their long pilgrimage from nescience to omniscience. They come forth, fragments of Itself, thrown out by the One Life, Sparks of the Eternal Flame, themselves to become Flames. The command of the Christ: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect," is not impossible of fulfilment. All we need is time—time to make mistakes and to learn from them; time to grow to the divine stature when the quaternary shall become the triangle.

Moreover, if we travel through the lower stages of the Purgatory, the Reformatory, which is termed Hell, we find that it gradually changes into Paradise, and has even a door open into Heaven, if you have brought with you woven cloth of good deeds to make the wedding garment, and of high aspirations to transmute into faculties to be used in another incarnation. Heaven is the place where that work is done—"but that is another story," and a very beautiful one it is.

There are, however, some other points to mention with regard to the Real Hell. Where you have done certain types of wrong to another, like a murder, you have a terrible experience of committing the crime over and over again. Also, if the murdered person was about in your own stage of evolution, you meet him after your own hanging, and the meeting is not pleasant, for you are at a disadvantage on such occasions. Suicide, again, keeps you in the Real Hell for an extra period, for you have to remain there till the time for which your physical body was built is completed, and you are neither comfortably alive nor comfortably dead. Only at the end of that period can you begin the normal post-mortem condition. During that period you are continually creating karma.

Again, the manner of dying and the thoughts then dominant have a powerful influence over you. Very many persons, unfortunately, believe in the awful pictures of everlasting torments drawn by many Christian preachers. They carry these with them across the threshold and are often in a state of pitiable terror. They are particularly difficult to help, because they generally think that the would-be comforter does not know the truth.

The importance of quiet and peaceful serenity in those around a death-bed is of peculiar importance. Noisy demonstrations of grief, any lamentations, are really cruel to the passing man or woman. If they are

wrapped in loving serenity, the step across, the passing to another room in the Father's house, is thus made easy, and the "terrors of death" disappear.

The points which seem to be of supreme importance are the orderly continuity of life and the supremacy of justice by the unchanging law of cause and effect. Orthodox Christendom, so far as one can understand, accepts the continuity of life; but by its loss of the knowledge of the law of Reincarnation, it has to make the whole of man's everlasting existence dependent on the few short years of a single life, even if the man be a congenital criminal, the offspring of a casual brief contact between a harlot and a blood-thirsty ruffian, ready to become a murderer for a small bribe. Brought up in a slum, unwanted by either parent, trained by curses and blows, taught to commit petty offences, punished whatever he does by parent or society, his life is a Real Hell on earth, he passes from crime to crime till he finishes at the gallows. Hell on earth and hell for the rest of his miserable existence, without even a chance of annihilation. Put brutally in this way, the tender-hearted Christian falls back on "the uncovenanted mercies of God." He does well, for as a wise Scripture says: "If I go down into Hell, behold, Thou art there." Where He is, all is well, for if there be pain in Hell, and He is there, the pain must be remedial and the end must be joy, for "Brahman is Bliss."

Now error is short lived and Truth is eternal. If an error lasts for ages, it lives by the kernel of Truth within the prickly husk of error. What then is the kernel of Truth in the husk of error? The Truth that sorrow follows on the heels of wrong-doing.

Said the Lord Buddha: "As the wheels of the cart follow the heels of the ox, so happiness follows good actions. As the wheels of the cart follow the heels of the ox, so sorrow follows the doing of wrong."

This is the Truth that underlies all the Heavens and Hells. This is the Eternal Law. And I have found that the frank statement of that law as a belief common to an advocate of everlasting Hell and myself, gave rise to a useful and interesting discussion. He was placated by my recognition of the truth of the essence of his ideas, and was then willing to consider modifications as to time. He also saw the Truth hidden in the Psalmist's discovery that he had found God in Hell. What could He be there for, He the all-loving, if not to rescue, to save? He did not say that he agreed, but I was contented to leave the idea to work in his mind; for the mind works more readily and with a smaller feeling of opposition if the element of challenge is eliminated.

The one thing which is certain is that God cannot be unjust. Is it just to create a place of everlasting torment, and to keep sentient beings alive when they would normally die, in order to torment them?

I have not the book to refer to, but if I remember rightly, the argument which interested me from its originality and by its novelty to me, was that those who were sent to Hell were those who—I am putting it badly—found their happiness in opposing God. It was the nature of devils to be in opposition to God, and that they could not be happy if they did not oppose. In any case it leaves untouched the "fact" of the existence of a Real Hell.

However, the Real Hell is part of the inevitable sequence between wrong-doing and suffering. From that we cannot escape. Men, eager to rescue others from wrong-doing, knowing it causes sorrow, and speaking to ignorant crowds of small intelligence, took the mistaken way of using symbols and images, which would, they thought, impress the simple folk whom they addressed. "The worm that dieth not and the fire which is not quenched" made a striking picture, and though the worm is not a biting animal, it served for the nonce. To minds more critical they could explain that they meant the gnawing of remorse for the evil act.

ETERNAL HELL

By

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

ETERNAL HELL

By

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

THE doctrine of Hell has lost its popularity. Indeed, to-day, it is hard even to imagine the mentality which found in the thought of Hell a certain stimulation, often a certain comfort. The Hell-fire sermon has gone, probably never to return, and references to Hell in current theology are slight, evasive, almost apologetic. Among the orthodox the belief in Hell is waning, among the unorthodox it was the first to go. And yet one cannot say that Hell is finally discredited. It has not, even by the unorthodox, been calmly dismissed from the scheme of things. People worry and question about the doctrine, even if they no longer give much thought to the reality. Either they feel that it ought to be definitely and authoritatively eliminated from the Christian creeds, or they ask whether there may not be some final justification of the idea.

It is in a measure astonishing that an idea of such antiquity—pre-Christian, pre-Jewish, almost as old as religion itself—should suddenly have become discredited by the thought of a not particularly thoughtful

age. For centuries and centuries philosophers whose minds walked familiarly on such ground, saw Hell as an integral part of any possible conception of immortality; indeed the idea of Hell may be called older than the idea of Heaven. The unhappy shades of the underworld, the prowling homeless spirits of the once-beloved—Rephaim and Dibukkim—are to be found in Jewish eschatology long before the ethical optimism of their Resurrection doctrines. In Greek thought the caverns of Hades have more poetry and more reality than the fields of Elysium. The Egyptians equipped their dead for a journey to an underworld of darkness and many strange waters. Even lovers of Christ throughout all Christian ages have believed in, and sometimes stressed, the terrors of Hell—a Hell of which He Himself has warned them, "where their worm dieth not, neither is their fire quenched."

It is curious, too, to find in later times, that every significant religious revival has been accompanied by a quickening sense of the danger and terror of Hell. The eighteenth century had grown slack, followers of the Deists had lost Hell and God together in a mist of ethics and pure reason. Came Wesley, stirring up the land, and God and Hell were back in their places. The Middle Ages grew humorous about Hell and told funny stories about the devil. Came Calvin, and Hell roared as it had never roared before, while Satan's jaws champed down on "infants a span long." Even

the Hell of Dr. Pusey was a fierier Hell than the Hell of Dr. Arnold, inasmuch as his faith was a fierier faith.

One might be tempted to diagnose the discredit of Hell to-day in such a fashion, and attribute it to a general decline in religious fervour. But only the lightest thought deprives one of such an explanation. The times may not be good for orthodoxy, but they are full of religious movement and interest. The man-in-the-street is probably interested in religion as he never was before, and up and down the country the religious life—both technically and spiritually—is reviving in a manner unknown since the Reformation. Even our "empty churches" compare well with the days when there used to be two or three communicants in St. Paul's Cathedral. We cannot put down the loss of Hell's prestige to mere indifference.

I should feel inclined to attribute it in the first place to its own exaggerations. Calvin and Wesley made of Hell a nightmare from which many are glad to be awake. The early Christian doctrine of Hell was comparatively mild, it existed chiefly for the benefit of the Other Man—for the Church's opponents in those controversies which rent its early years, and compared to which our modern controversies seem mealy-mouthed and flat. (An ecclesiastically-minded Red Queen might have said to Alice "I have known controversies, compared to which this is an amicable

agreement.") In the Middle Ages Hell still existed chiefly for heretics and notorious sinners. The faithful knew it would be their own fault if they went there, and feared with discretion. But to the preachers and congregations of the Evangelical revival, Hell was not so much a yawning pit as a pursuing monster ravening the saints. If we read Wesley's Journal, or still more notably the journals and reminiscences of humbler revivalists, we find the fear of Hell shadowing the lives of men and women whose one desire was to walk uprightly with their God—to be escaped only by some psychological convulsion which put the soul for ever in safety with the Elect.

Probably these people, with their ancestors in Puritan days, were more frightened of Hell than anyone before or since. Hell, for them, did not exist merely as the unrepentant sinner's "own place," but as the saint's possible exile—a man might find himself in Hell despite his efforts to achieve Heaven. Texts torn from their context and read in ignorance of what the rest of the Christian community believed, scared certain poor souls nearly out of their wits. It is almost unbearable to read the first part of Bunyan's "Grace Abounding," to see the poor boy, with no more on his conscience than a few oaths and a game of tip-cat, agonizedly dooming himself to eternal torment as a "profane person such as Esau, who found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

It is scarcely wonderful that such a state of affairs should have brought its reaction, and it is only according to the usual way of things that the older, milder doctrine of Hell should have been overthrown together with Calvin's sadistic innovations.

Another reason for the downfall of this really ancient and important belief may be found in a growing humanitarianism, such as has already abolished many ruthless human judgments and indifferences. After all, is it more cruel to imagine helpless children in Hell than actually to make them work in coal mines, send them to gaol, or even hang them for petty offences? We have gone far since the days of child labour and child executions, and are beginning to ask ourselves—unnecessarily I think—if we are not growing more merciful than God. Anyhow, the fact remains that scarcely any of us would obtain the slightest pleasure from the thought of our most hated enemy in Hell—a thought with which even the saints occasionally refreshed themselves.

Yet again, the growth of Biblical criticism has done for modern opinion what the growth of humanitarianism has done for modern sentiment. At one time there were always certain texts with which the head was forced to deny the heart's aspiration. But now these texts do not stand so firmly. Some are difficult to get rid of, but in certain of them, we are told, our Lord was merely looking round Him at the blazing rubbish-

heaps of the valley of Gehenna; while in others, the Jacobean translators loosely rendered as Hell a term signifying merely the Hebrew *Sheol*, or grave, the abode of all departed spirits. Farrar's "Larger Hope" did much to bring these conclusions home to the man-in-the-street, who was glad enough to abolish Hell at the bidding of a Dean.

But perhaps the most effective cause of the modern attitude towards Hell is the modern attitude towards God—and in this cause perhaps we shall find a weakness which really lies at the foot of all attempts to demolish Hell completely, the weakness of a fundamental misconception. The whole tendency of the last fifty years has been, if I may use the expression without offence, to make God appear increasingly amiable. This tendency is something apart from the reaction against the idea of eternal damnation, apart also from any growth in human mercy. It belongs rather to a generally increasing slackness of outlook, which does not necessarily mean indifference to religious matters, for this—as I have tried to show—is not an indifferent age. It is part of the substitution in popular esteem of natural science for philosophy and metaphysics. It is part of the growing popularization of thought, spreading it out over a lower and wider area, instead of leaving it hung on a few aristocratic peaks above valleys of democratic darkness. Demos thinks, he thinks emotionally, he thinks gymnastically, leaping

from stone to stone and ignoring the currents between; his thought is the significant thought of the day; his voice drowns the voices of the few trained thinkers and philosophers who still survive in an age of amateurs.

Fifty or a hundred years ago the average man had rather an austere conception of God. We are sometimes told that he went in terror of Him, but I think that is an exaggeration. The people who feared Hell so desperately were, for the most part, pious, devout people, the very last, one would have thought, who need have felt in any imminent danger. The fear of Hell was occasionally responsible for the crossing of the border-line between religion and neurosis. But the plain man, who was neither neurotic nor specially pious, believed in Hell and feared God—which is a very different thing.

He probably did not think much for himself—the elect did that and landed themselves in all sorts of emotional and intellectual quagmires. The plain man merely believed what he was told—that God is love, but will by no means clear the wicked, though when the wicked man turn from his wickedness and doeth that which is lawful and right he shall save his soul alive. He believed that stubborn resistance of God's will would inevitably be punished hereafter, just as stubborn resistance of the law would be punished here. He believed that "the road to ruin" led to nowhere

else, and his idea of justice would have been outraged by the doctrine that the determined sinner shall inherit the kingdom equally with the saint, and the King's enemies reign in glory with the King's friends.

No doubt he may have sometimes carried his ideas of justice too far, allowed them to smack occasionally of vindictiveness. Nevertheless, I would contend, his ideas are in closer correspondence with reality than the ideas of his successor to-day.

The modern man, as a rule, does not fear God—his God would not hurt a fly, and endures with perfect good-nature the insults, indifferences and oppositions of his creation. Demos has not so far succeeded in abolishing all social distinctions—he still, for the most part, respects the differences between an earthly King and his subjects, or even between a human lord and a commoner. But he will gaily abolish the difference between the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and the souls which He has made. The doctrine of divine immanence has been seized by the multitude and divided up amongst us. We are all Sons of God, Parts of the Divine, Greater than Ourselves and so on and so on. Of old time, men used sometimes to try to propitiate God by pleading the great things they had done for Him, suing for pardon for their works' sake —"Lord, in Thy Name we have cast out devils." To-day men no longer sue for pardon, but claim immunity, and they no longer plead what they have done,

but boast of what they are, near kin of Godhead souls of noble worth.

Moreover, if we examine our attitude towards God I feel that most of us will find something like this. "I don't think I am better than other people, but neither do I think I am any worse. I do the best I can, and I simply refuse to worry about the rest. I have my faults, but they are honest faults. I cannot believe that God really bothers very much about them. Anyhow I'm sure He would not condemn me. He condemns rather the good people who go to church and then judge others. He said 'Judge not that ye be not judged,' so He won't judge me. After all, am I not made in His image? I don't believe He minds ordinary human sins. Besides, my experiences have helped me to a broader view of life, a view which good people nearly always lack. Good people's lives are full of inhibitions—that's why they are always rather censorious or a trifle gaga. If they were honest and let themselves go, they would neither be so censorious nor so gaga . . . God likes an honest man like myself better than He likes a vinegary and foolish saint, and as of course I don't believe He'd send those poor people to Hell—why should He? I wouldn't do it myself—I certainly don't believe He'll send me."

I hope this meditation is not a caricature. If it is, I think the reason is only that I have put our innermost thoughts into plainer language than many of us would

use. The language is incredibly naïve, but I do not think it is more naïve than the thought which underlies many more sophisticated apologies. In spite of our modern enlightenment we are still naïve in our ideas of God. The general conception of God to-day is just as anthropomorphic as the old conceptions it is usual to deride. We regard certain Old Testament ideas of God as altogether too "personal" (using the word in its non-theological sense), as belonging to a primitive religious system, which gradually evolved into the nobler conception of such teachers as Isaiah and the writers of certain psalms. But it is hard to see that our modern ideas of God are any less personal and human. The God of modern British democracy differs only from Jehovah in that he lacks his imaginative sublimities, and whereas Jehovah's anthropomorphism is violent, vengeful, relentless and military, the modern God is anthropomorphically soft, good-natured, haphazard and pacifist.

Sophisticated in the arts, advanced in the sciences, proficient in all games and manly sports, we are often in matters eternal more primitive than the ancient Hebrews, and in theology we are mere rabbits. We still, most of us, think of God as a person and of Hell as a place, so we are still bothered by the idea of God "sending a man to Hell." Our idea of divine omnipotence is the omnipotence of a tyrant, who can at will condemn a man to death or exalt him to his right

hand. We have no conception of omnipotence as law; law which cannot be broken. The theological poser with which many children meet the childish conceptions of God which certain adults try to force upon them—"Could God make a thing happen and not happen at the same time?"—is really a serious and valid question. The answer, generally given in embarrassment and annoyance, "Of course he can't," implies the true idea of omnipotence which is so seldom realized—that in the Absolute there can be no contradiction, no variableness nor shadow of turning. God is Law, and as such cannot contradict Himself by breaking the Law.

The chief difficulties of the doctrine of eternal Hell centre round those surviving beliefs in persons and places. For though our religious ideas may be primitive, our scientific humanitarianism is not, and we reasonably recoil from the thought of poor suffering souls being shut out of Heaven and condemned to an endless future of misery. If we regard Heaven as a sort of glorified Sunday-school treat to which the good children are admitted, while the bad ones are shut out, we believe as a natural consequence that any merciful relenting of the Teacher would result in the bad boys enjoying themselves just as much as the good ones, or even more. But if we cease to think of God as a person, avenging, indulging, relenting, and Heaven a place where all would be equally happy if

only they could get inside, we may find ourselves confronted by a Hell that is as inevitable to mercy as to justice.

Conceive Heaven simply as a state of perfect union with God. Whether space or time enter that state is a different and doubtful matter—they do not affect its prime conditions. Conceive a soul that has always turned away from God, always gone its own way apart from Him and sought itself. Conceive such a soul in such a union. It is inconceivable.

External states of union can exist between objects fundamentally opposed, but such unions are altogether outside any ideas of eternity in its true meaning of perfection. They are imperfect and impermanent. A perfect union between God and a soul that hates or is indifferent to Him is a contradiction in terms, and Heaven consists entirely of such a union.

If we imagine that a soul which has no desire for union with God can be compelled to desire it, then we must abandon the doctrine of human free-will. Human free-will is far too vast a subject to consider here, and I agree that if we are willing to relinquish it and to regard ourselves as puppets dangling on cosmic strings, then there is no reason why the great Showman should not make us all happy in the end. But I am assuming that we hold that doctrine together with other main doctrines of the Christian philosophy, or else we should not be bothering about Hell.

I am assuming that we definitely have a power of choice—not perhaps such a free choice as sometimes appears on the surface—but a kind of main choice between good and evil. There is in each of us a general trend which is something more than desire. It corresponds to the "hormic drive" of certain psychologists, the "libido" of others. This trend, though often sluggish, impeded, unsure, is in certain cases mainly towards God or some idea of goodness. In others there is a different motion—an inward rather than an outward drive, a direction away from God, away from our fellow-men, inwards towards the self.

If we believe that our bodies are the mechanism by which our souls are trained and fixed through experience of a three-dimensional world, it is reasonable to believe that the loss of that mechanism at death leaves the soul definitely incapable of any fundamental changes. It can only go on the way it has begun—it has already been shaped for its end, and now can but fulfil it. We can imagine many souls going forward, losing as they go all those uncertainties and imperfections that would have hindered their ultimate union with God. We can equally imagine others forced by their initial momentum more and more into their inward drive until they reach a point of complete introversion. For Hell, the opposite of Heaven which is union with God, is nothing more or less than a complete or eternal state of self-absorption. We often use

the term loosely and figuratively; if we use it strictly and literally we see that the soul has become a debased image of the serpent that "eats his own accursed tail and calls himself eternity." Where God should be there is only himself, and this self, removed by its introversion from the source of its life, has become a mere parasite—"the worm that never dies," feeding eternally and abominably upon itself.

It is a revolting thought, but by no stretch of mercy or imagination could one picture such a soul in heaven, transferred by some religious magic from its self-battening suicide to a self-abandoning union with the source of the life it has rejected. Swedenborg refers once or twice to the inhabitants of his highly concrete and non-metaphysical hell being transferred at their own desire to his equally concrete heaven, where they simply fall down in agonies of suffocation, unable to breathe so rare an atmosphere, and crying out for the coarser fumes which alone can sustain their existence. It is an impressive image, if somewhat heavily constructed.

We are left, as we must be left inevitably in our present state of knowledge, with a whole heap of unresolved difficulties and unanswered questions. But if in each case we keep the problem as clear as may be of physical terms and conditions, it will not seem quite so hopeless of solution. In all philosophical questions our chief difficulties centre round considerations of

space and time, and are bound up in the three-dimensional world of our experience. If we can conceive that world as image rather than reality we shall do better. For the image, furnishing the necessary outward sign, can show us the way to reality, whereas once it is regarded as reality itself, it closes the way.

It is helpful to realize eternity not as duration but as quality. The terms "eternal hell" and "eternal punishment" do not necessarily signify everlasting hell and punishment without end. They signify a completeness of condemnation, rejection and death, the absolute of our ordinary relative view of such things. There is not necessarily any conception of time involved. Just as "eternal life" stands for life that is complete, boundless, supreme, so "eternal death" stands for death that is complete, boundless, supreme. Death as we have it now is merely relative. It is just a series of chemical changes, involving changes of appearance and function. The dead plant is so much alive that its decomposition gives life and growth to other forms of matter, and the same is true of the dead body. But of the dead soul who can speak? Its death is "eternal"—involving no mere change of function, but its end.

The doctrine of Hell need no longer terrify the fearful with its old suggestions of a cruel celestial hunter and traps yawning for the unwary. Hell cannot be for any but those who have, of their own free will,

rejected whatever idea has been in their special circumstances their idea of good. We need not imagine it full of poor ignorant heathen nor of well-meaning but sore-tried sinners. Neither need we imagine the scenes of torment and horror that—deplorably no doubt—gladdened the heart of mediæval and Puritan saint. But to discard it altogether is also to discard our belief in human free will, and to make of an ordered universe a mere good-natured haphazard, fragmentary system, wherein it doesn't particularly matter what one does or what one is, because it is all certain to come right in the end.

Such supreme states as eternal life and eternal death are inconceivable to us in our present state of knowledge and experience. Whether they will ever be conceivable we do not know. But we have for their elucidation certain symbols by means of which we may at least spell out some of their significance. The function of revelation is to introduce images that correspond to eternal truths. To alter or suppress these images, such as we have in the creeds and scriptures and in the hereditary experience of the Church, is to alter and suppress eternal truths themselves, even though the image is not the truth but the key to its solution. If in writing I substitute one word for another, I have—unless the word is a synonym—altered either subtly or grossly the meaning of what I write, though the written word is merely the symbol of the

spoken word, and the spoken word itself is only the symbol of the idea behind it. If we alter or suppress the symbol of Hell, as revealed to religious experience in the course of its long progress through the ages, we are definitely altering or suppressing a religious truth. All truth is sacramental, and the integrity of the outward sign is essential to the efficacy of the inward grace. We are wise if we preserve carefully the outward sign, in hope that time will make us sufficiently clear-eyed to see one day the reality underlying it. Our education has still probably some hundreds of centuries to go, and at the end of them we may be able to spell out this difficult word that confuses us so much now. If we lose heart and substitute for it some other word that we can already read or think we can, we shall have thrown away the key to the problem—that is all.

HELL: A THEOLOGICAL EXPOSITION

By

THE REV. W. E. ORCHARD

HELL: A THEOLOGICAL EXPOSITION

By

THE REV. W. E. ORCHARD

THE doctrine of Hell has, in recent years, not only been widely challenged by opponents of the Christian religion, but widely abandoned by professed Christians; and, even by the most orthodox believers, the tendency is to maintain a discreet reserve on the subject. Opponents of the faith have made it one of their main objections against accepting the truth of the Christian religion that it contains a doctrine embodying, as they feel, such monstrous, meaningless, and unjust cruelty; condemning, as they understand it must, the vast majority of mankind to eternal torment; and that for no fault of their own, since most of them who thus are destined to spend their eternity in Hell have either never had a chance of hearing the good news which alone could save them, or have been unable to understand its terms or accept its theological assumptions.

The attempts made by Christian apologists to meet these objections have not only lacked authority, but often they seem to contradict the agreed opinions held by theologians in the past, propose novel and purely

speculative solutions, or appear to contradict the plain teaching of Christ; while all attempts to diminish the numbers, the sufferings, or the extension of time involved in Hell, fail to remove the objections of extreme humanitarians, so long as God is conceived as directly or indirectly involved in the punishment of even one soul. Strangely enough, a similar conclusion on this subject has been arrived at by both rationalistic opponents and vigorous exponents of Christianity: namely, that its entire theological structure and its whole system of redemption stands or falls with the doctrine of Hell. If there is no Hell to be saved from, why was an Atonement undertaken which involved such suffering to Christ, and where then can be found the compelling force of the evangelistic appeal? The doctrine of Hell is therefore the very keystone of Christian Theology: if it has fallen out, nothing can rebuild the system.

There are, of course, many Christian believers, whether professional theologians, or intelligent laymen, who refuse to yield to the pressure of this dilemma. They are not impressed by the arguments of the rationalist on one side, or of the traditionalist on the other, and all the less because they happen to agree in their conclusions. While many an earnest layman is simply willing to stake his faith in God that to condemn any soul to Hell would be entirely inconsistent with what he considers to be the main article of the

Christian faith, namely, that God is love; there are not wanting capable scholars and distinguished theologians who bring to the support of that spontaneous intuition textual expositions and explanations that not only prove the old belief in Hell to be erroneous, but trace how the misunderstandings arose that have done so much harm and created such prejudice against the faith.

It will, therefore, be necessary to examine, however briefly, the explanations which it is believed sufficiently relieve this doctrine of its dread and difficulty. We may take first those attempts which still found themselves upon an acceptance of the Scriptures as containing material which can be used for conveying accurate and trustworthy information about the other world. Some students who have given considerable study to the Scriptures are prepared to give exhaustive proofs of the idea that all reference to the punishment of the impenitent in Hell is to be taken as vividly describing their swift and final annihilation. This explanation has, however, failed to impress other equally painstaking students, and it must strike the ordinary reader of the New Testament as sufficiently contradicted by many texts which speak of actual pain or torture, and that as continuing for ever. Moreover, the destruction of the wicked is depicted in such terms of wrath and terror as still to leave the humanitarian

shocked, while it fails to remove the objection that even the worst of us has deserved no such fate.

It is a much more acceptable interpretation to many if, instead of regarding the wicked as having to be destroyed by a special act of God, immortality can be regarded as a special gift of God, a reward for true faith or, in more modern terms, the natural consequence of a certain degree of moral and spiritual attainment. Man, thus conceived, is not constitutionally or universally immortal, but only, as the term has been coined, immortable; that is, capable for immortality, which is bound up, more or less definitely, according to a more or less orthodox exposition, with faith in Christ. The doctrine of conditional immortality, as it has been designated, does meet the legitimate claim that the New Testament conception of eternal life is more than the mere perpetuation of personal existence, and is a spiritual gift, the possession of which can be entered upon in this life. But the doctrine is not only countered by those Scriptural references which assume a continuance of existence for the wicked as well as for the good, but thinkers who stand confessedly outside the Christian faith and who place little reliance upon the Scriptures for deciding such questions, either regard the immortality of the soul as a delusion, or at least, as a baseless speculation, or else they regard it as a natural prerogative of the human species as such. All Catholic, and most Prot-

estant theologians of any standing, while admitting considerable differences between the Christian expectation of eternal life and the merely natural immortality of the soul, refuse to condemn this widespread belief of the human mind; neither can they concede that faith in Christ makes such a difference to human nature as to constitute believers a different species, nor bring themselves to believe that God will take away His gift of immortality, which they regard as so fundamental to, and distinctive of, humanity.

Scholars of distinction and care have questioned, however, whether the Scriptural terminology of Eternity strictly involves unending existence, and have suggested that it is capable of meaning only prolonged, but not necessarily, interminable time. The language of both Hebrew and Greek Scriptures may be sometimes ambiguous as to whether actual eternity is meant, but for its bearing upon the present problem it is sufficient to note that precisely the same terminology is employed to measure the continued life of the blessed, while no other terms are available to describe even the eternal existence of God.

Theological expositors who allow themselves more liberty with the sacred text are inclined to suspect that the teaching of Christ on this subject has been subject to interpolations or, at least, exaggerations due to current ideas; or, if the theologian is of the more radical persuasion, Jesus will Himself be credited with

taking over contemporary conceptions without sufficient examination; or with failing, on this point, from pressing to a conclusion that which was entailed in His own teaching concerning forgiveness and the Fatherhood of God.

It will be seen that in this estimate the teaching of Jesus concerning forgiveness, or the Apostle's doctrine that God is Love, is erected into a standard by which the rest of the teaching can be tried, and anything which seems contradictory may be regarded as of less value or rejected as unauthoritative. The standard thus picked out as not only revealing that which fails to reach the same height, but cancelling all that seems to fall short, of course depends upon the critic's own judgment of what is supreme as well as what is inconsistent with it. Nevertheless, there can be no outright dismissal of the possibility of erecting such a standard and judging all else by that standard; for it is quite possible that in moments of illumination a thinker may record what he sees, and yet fail to flash that light upon certain facts or problems, either because his mind is there governed by conservatism, or blinded by fear of possible consequences. Nor can any conclusive appeal be made to the regulation that an authority accepted on one point must be accepted on all. Nearly all educated judgment would admit that we have different standards of morality and different stages of revelation in the Old and New Testa-

ments. Most critics who would appreciate passages of extreme beauty and high religious value, for instance, in Jeremiah, would nevertheless hold that in others the prophet fell short of the Christian view of forgiveness or even a high human standard of pity. We could only exclude Christ's teaching from such a process of differentiation if it was held that His mind was possessed of full and informative revelation on all such points; and not even all those who regard Christ as the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity are agreed about the extent or the intensity to which His human mind received Divine illumination, while, of course, it is the presence in His teaching of what are felt to be unilluminated areas of thought that keeps some from believing in the Incarnation at all.

Nevertheless, without appealing to a notion of authority which all critics of this doctrine would not recognize, there are other considerations which at least demand some consideration and respect. It must be admitted that when from the same lips there came doctrines of such tender forgiveness and such strong condemnation, declarations of universal love and proclamations of warning to individuals, we ought to examine the latter with more care than if they fell from the lips of one notoriously hard and unfailingly severe; especially when universal forgiveness is discovered to exclude only those who themselves refuse to forgive, and it is realized that the penalties are those

that love cannot prevent falling upon those who hate. For it will be admitted that Jesus did speak, for instance, in terms of unmistakable seriousness about an unforgivable sin, and, in this particularly, in such a way that we can expressly exonerate Him from any personal feeling of vindictiveness, since He distinctly affirms that this sin will not be laid to the charge of those who may speak against Himself, but only of those who blaspheme the Holy Ghost; that is, if we may interpret widely, of those who deny their own most sacred convictions, reject clearly-perceived spiritual monitions, and wilfully obscure their own interior light. Again, it is in a most humanitarian passage (it is, at least, the one that humanitarians most often quote, although it contains as strong a consciousness of His own Divinity as can be found anywhere; since He declares that He stands in such intimate relations with all humanity that a hurt done to the least is a hurt to Himself), that Jesus assigns those guilty of a lack of humanity to the fate reserved for the devil and his angels, namely, that of everlasting fire. If it is pointed out, as it rightly can be, that His reference to the fire that is not quenched and the worm that dieth not, is symbolic, it still has to be asked, if these are only symbols, will the reality be less dreadful than the symbol? And if again it is legitimately objected that we must not simply transfer to the direct action of God the punishments of the "outer darkness" or

"the tormentors," inflicted in parables which borrow illustrations from oriental despotism, it does not prove that these parables contain no warning of something dreadful that may happen to the unprepared or the unforgiving. The least that can be asked of those who often dismiss Gospel references of this nature is that they shall treat them with the seriousness that they surely demand.

We must go further, and ask what alternative principles or further processes can be conceived as opening out a larger hope or guaranteeing final salvation to the rebellious and the impenitent. It is too late to apply to this controversy anything which invokes irresistible grace: Calvinism is no longer in favour, nor can it be made use of for such a novel purpose. Neither is the subject easily disposed of by simply appealing to the regulative principle of the Love of God. That Love has given its great commendation of itself in the Cross of Christ, and if that does not move the heart, what further disclosure is there to be made that will? It must be remembered that to a nature which has chosen to be loveless, the revelation of Love might be of all things most hateful and intolerable; to make it possible for such a soul in love with sin to enter Heaven would have no other effect than to plunge it into Hell. As light upon the eye diseased, or beauty upon the worshipper of ugliness, or the contrast between cleanliness and that which has chosen

to be unclean, such would it be, not only for the wicked and rebellious, but even for an imperfect or sin-stained soul to come into the realm of the perfect light, the absolute holiness and infinite glory of God. Mercy, love, pity would be the most abhorrent of all sights and the most torturing of all influences to the merciless, the loveless, and the pitiless.

It is therefore generally admitted by the more thoughtful that if the idea of an eternal Hell is to be evaded it can only be by the substitution of some supernatural, patiently persuasive and perfectly purifying process as a preparation for Heaven; for Heaven has its demands of endurance no less than Hell; there are "everlasting burnings" which have not only to be endured, but to be welcomed as joyous light and grateful warmth, if man is to dwell with them. But before we examine the provision or the possibility of such a transforming process, we must put on one side as really irrelevant, and therefore calling for no further treatment than sufficient to dispel misunderstanding, the concern for souls who may never have been clearly faced in this world with the issues of faith, or certainly never have been confronted with that revelation of the Love of God which, to the vision of faith, is contained in the Cross of Christ. Spiritual principles make it clear that mere ignorance, error, or misunderstanding, the lack of opportunity, attention or capacity cannot be enough to condemn any soul to eternal pun-

ishment. On the other hand, the Scriptures make it clear that no soul can enter Heaven apart from the regenerating work of Christ, which for its effectiveness demands faith in His redemptive sacrifice. Therefore, in order to constitute a determinative judgment, the soul must, at some time or another, be confronted with the vision of Christ crucified, and under such illumination that there shall be realized all that is contained in it of love and condescension, the forgiveness therein offered, as well as the eternal consequences of acceptance or rejection, especially if a choice is to be made which shall finally determine destiny. Some such clearing of the issues, and some such provision of the conditions of a free, full, and final choice, are equally necessary, both on any principles of justice and to ensure an adequate spiritual preparation for Heaven. This much we can gather from the Scriptures there shall be, and that for every one; for they assure us that "we must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ," and again, that "every eye shall see Him, and they which pierced Him." From such statements it can safely be assumed that it will be the sight of Christ, and of Him as crucified, that shall constitute for every soul, whatever its religious knowledge and spiritual opportunities have been in this life, both a free decision and a final judgment. Thoughtful theologians of even the most rigid schools are therefore agreed that such a

vision of Christ can alone be decisive of any soul's eternal destiny.

It is, however, necessary that this confronting of every soul after death with what might be taken, by some, to involve the provision of a second chance, and by others, as guaranteeing universal salvation, should be more carefully examined to see whether it carries any such meaning. The doctrine of a second chance of accepting or rejecting Christ is rightly suspected by many, because it dangerously reduces the importance of this life. If this life does not decide the life to come, then either its purpose is not clear, or it is not properly designed for its purpose; since, if any soul needs a second chance this life might as well have been altogether omitted. If, however, we are considering the case of those souls who, having never heard of Christ in this life, are to be confronted with a revelation of Him immediately after death, this could certainly not be described as a second chance; it would be the first chance they had had of making a final decision. It must be admitted, however, that the Scripture speaks of that meeting with Christ immediately after death as for purposes of judgment rather than of evangelistic revelation. This limitation suffices, however, to make the solution clear. That confronting of the soul with Christ will not be so much to determine, as to reveal, what its attitude has implicitly been. Whatever our knowledge of Christ and His Gospel

has been, our attitude to goodness, truth and beauty, our obedience to the truth we have known or the light we have seen, will have contributed to determine beforehand our attitude to Christ thus revealed. On the other hand, if this life entirely determined destiny for everyone, whether they had known of Christ or not, simply because of their attitude towards their own ethical standards, then there would have been no necessity for the Incarnation and the Atonement, save perhaps, for the increase of enlightenment they would have shed on the purpose of this life. We possess in the Scriptures, however, an account of Christ going to preach to the spirits in prison, on which much surely can be built concerning the necessity and the effect of an evangelizing revelation for every soul after death. Therefore, while life is always tending to a determination of destiny, it seems allowable to conclude that destiny is not finally fixed in this life, but only immediately after this life ends; otherwise there would be no need for the judgment which we are told follows death, presumably without interval; for souls would be automatically disposed for their destiny without any further process being necessary.

We must now inquire whether this presentation of a perfectly conditioned decision for every soul, carries with it the assurance of universal salvation? If we could take it as axiomatic that "we must needs love the highest when we see it," we should have to infer

that the sight of Christ Crucified would break down all rebellion, call out saving faith, and eternally unite the soul in love to Him; indeed, such a conclusion seems to be sanctioned by the scholastic doctrine that the sight of God as He is instantaneously deprives the soul of the freedom to do otherwise than be united to Him in eternal desire and perfect love. Those, however, who would take advantage of that doctrine must also recognize that some distinction seems to be made in the Scriptures between standing before the judgment seat of Christ and beholding the face of God; between beholding Christ Crucified and seeing Him as He is. The one is a preparation for the other, and the decision in the first instance must be a free decision, if that to which it may lead is to be final and fixed. It cannot therefore be dogmatically assumed that the effect of the vision of Christ Crucified, even in the perfect light of eternity, will necessarily be the same for every soul. Freedom will have its place, and such a place, that it is capable of making a final decision in either direction; namely to dwell with God eternally or flee from Him for ever.

There are those, however, who, shrink from a dogmatic and facile universalism, because they have some appreciation of this necessity of allowing a place for real freedom, especially if eternal union with God is to be a real choice of the soul and not simply an inevitable absorption of individuality in God. Moreover,

they have sufficient sense of the fatal consequences of sin and the possibility of a final wedding of the soul to evil to prevent their adopting what may look like an easy solution, but, on further consideration is seen to involve the negation of freedom and the imposition of some kind of coercion. Such careful thinkers, whose universalism may be described as a hope rather than a dogma, are not only compelled to posit the provision of such a vision of Christ as must awaken penitence even in the worst of souls, but some educative and purgative process preceding that vision of God which will make it possible to dispense with further freedom, or, rather, evoke an act of freedom which, making an eternal choice, will never be rescinded and never need to be renewed.

It is interesting to notice that in the recognition of this necessity the idea of purgatory, so completely repudiated at the Reformation, has here been adopted by liberal theology. Indeed, the idea has returned with a vengeance, for now the idea of purgatory threatens to blot out Hell and, in some degree, Heaven itself; for this type of thought often feels constrained to picture a heaven of continuous progress, which would surely involve some degree of dissatisfaction and struggle, and therefore of pain. The purgatorial process is, however, adopted, because it is believed that it does provide a certain hope for all souls. Repentance at the sight of Christ is regarded as inevitable, and the purga-

torial process is believed to be finally efficacious however long it may take.

It is quite certain, however, that not only was the process of purgation never conceived by pre-Reformation theologians as a sanction of universalism, since, of course, it was believed to be available only for those who died in faith and penitence, but that the New Testament, while it has but little to say on this subject, however sufficient it may be to prove the doctrine of Purgatory, contains such clear predictions and such solemn warnings about the fate of the wicked, as we can hardly reconcile with a terminable process of remedial punishment, or explain as a revelation of an inevitably purgatorial process awaiting all souls in the life to come. It is difficult to think moreover that these solemn warnings were given merely to frighten souls away from an abstract possibility, or to exhort them not to incur consequences of a wrong decision, which if found too unpleasant could nevertheless always be remedied by repentance, however hard it might be come at, or whatever reparation for delay would have to be made. Further, it must be remembered that to allow for the possibility of changing our destiny in the other world, might have to work in two directions, and while introducing hope into Hell, might introduce uncertainty into Heaven.

The researches of modern psychology provide little to encourage the optimism of universalist theology.

All that we know about character shows us that its tendency is inevitably towards fixity in one direction or another. Moreover, not only do the predicted consequences of suffering often not prevail to prevent sin, but the actual experience of suffering does not always secure repentance. Even the endurance in this world of a mental misery which is all too terribly reminiscent of the Scriptural descriptions of Hell, can be found combined with a desperate resistance against any remedy of repentance, or proffer of help, the very misery being clung to as if there had taken place the awful perversion of being in love with misery; the strange opposites being conjoined of an unbearable wretchedness with a determination to cling to it at all costs. Modern psychology has something to reveal of the essential irrepressibility of conscience, as it has of the practical infallibility of the memory; these two things taken together provide possibilities for the imagination of what Hell might mean, which neither the symbols of the New Testament, nor the pictures of Dante exaggerate; and it should be remembered that Dante pictures not so much the punishment inflicted for sin as the punishment that sin itself is discerned to inflict upon the soul. Browning's famous line still gathers weight: "There may be Heaven; there must be Hell." When we consider all the facts that psychology reveals, we are bound to admit the reality there is in the idea of Hell; the sanity of

Christ's teaching, New Testament doctrine, and orthodox theology in maintaining the actual possibility of Hell; and the warning that should therefore be uttered by all true and serious evangelism. If it be objected that such warnings do no good, this is surely an objection that universalism, not orthodoxy, has to consider. Moreover, the warnings need to be addressed to those who have seen the light and acknowledged the good, for it requires disobedience and rebellion to constitute Hell.

Nevertheless, the subject should not be weighted with an intensity or an extension beyond what is necessary. There is no need to assume that, on any revealed or natural conditions, the vast majority of mankind is bound for such a Hell of suffering as it is impossible for us to think of, or conceive that the Love of God would permit. It is not required of us to hold that any single soul is at this moment in Hell; we must not dare to judge of anyone now on earth that this is his inevitable destiny. All the New Testament tells us about individual destiny is that no one can be sure, and that there will be many surprises when the Day reveals it. Further, not only must there be many degrees of suffering corresponding to the degrees of sin, but we must not weight "eternal punishment" by multiplying conscious suffering by endlessly protracted time. Eternity for the impenitent,

any more than for the blessed, cannot be simply identified with the everlasting sequence of time. Eternity is a condition which time cannot measure; but it may be measured rather by intensity of consciousness. Hell, therefore, may mean simply an intense sense of what the deprivation of God means, combined with an equally intense determination to deprive oneself of Him: both together and all at once. So far, a reasonable interpretation of eternal punishment meets what the annihilationist is feeling after; though his explanations and his conclusions may be wrong.

The New Testament symbol of fire has, however, been retained in Catholic theology, but understood as if it were a material fire; and even although modern Roman Catholic theologians concede that material fire cannot have the same effect in the other world as it has in this, the affirmation of this notion conveys to the imagination the sense of intolerable pain. This somewhat strange clinging to materiality on this point, while it may contain a useful reminder that material things are not going to be destroyed, but only transformed, when they will contribute to the blessedness of Heaven, seems, however, only to add to the misery of Hell. Yet it need not be so. Those who demand that this fire is only symbolical say, of torment of mind, must recognize that this makes things worse, for there is a torment of the mind far worse than anything fire

can inflict on the body. The idea of the materiality of this fire seems, therefore, rather to offer some relief. It is noticeable, however, that the same materiality is not ascribed to the flames of Purgatory. A similar relief, therefore, seems to be deducible from the important treatise of St. Catherine of Genoa on Purgatory, the principle of which is that, it is the same glory of God which constitutes the happy sunshine of Heaven, the refining process of Purgatory and the flaming fires of Hell. This seems to permit us to conceive the fire of Hell as something that keeps the impenitent from coming into contact with the glory of God's presence, which to them would certainly be intolerable. Hell, therefore, need not be considered as actually the worst possible kind of existence; pious Catholic writers have maintained that the Blood of Christ makes some difference even to Hell; there is certainly something that would be even more intolerable to the impenitent than Hell; namely, Heaven.

It is possible to hope, and it is our duty to labour for the salvation of all souls, and we can rightly pray for all souls departed. Universalism, therefore, remains possible as a hope, while it cannot be held as a dogma. Moreover, although Hell can never be thought of without pain, and must always constitute a problem for our mind, we ought to combine the terrible pictures of the New Testament with the assurance that

God would allow nothing that is incompatible with absolute justice, unchanging mercy or infinite love. It is possible to hold that there is a solution of this painful problem which has not been revealed to us. But if we are to retain even a universal hope, that must depend upon a perfect revelation of God's Love made to all souls when they reach the other world, far surpassing in efficacy the revelation of the Cross in this world. It is conceivable that this might be possible in the pure light of eternity, when earth's glare is dimmed, and the distractions of this world are done away, and when the eternal consequences of the choice that is to be made are equally discerned. But to make the effect of that choice a dogmatic certainty is to imperil freedom; while to interpret that revelation as anything like a second chance is seriously to reduce the probative and educative value of this life.

Some have found hints in the New Testament of something lying beyond even its farthest horizons: a restoration of all things, when all shall be reconciled, and Hell itself shall be destroyed; but there is nothing sufficient to contradict what is elsewhere clearly set forth, or that can blunt the edge of its serious and repeated warnings against impenitent rebellion. We can only stand by what has been revealed, and be content to show that a dogmatic universalism cannot construct a rational alternative scheme; no natural or

spiritual considerations overthrow and nothing in modern psychology disproves the orthodox doctrine about Hell, nor diminishes the gravity of Christ's teaching on the subject; and therefore, nothing removes from the realm of possibility a peril against which every soul must be warned to guard itself by salutary fear, lively faith and the cultivation of love towards both God and man.

CHANGING VIEWS

By

THE REV. FRED W. NORWOOD

CHANGING VIEWS

By

THE REV. FRED W. NORWOOD

IT WOULD be hard to say what is the general belief in our time in the reality of Hell.

Many believe in it, but shrink from any attempt to put their belief into plain words. Many put into plain words what they understand Christianity teaches and then announce their disbelief. Many openly scorn the entire conception.

Undoubtedly, both with the believer and the unbeliever, there has been a turning away from the older forms of belief. A distinct change has passed over the teaching and preaching of religion in this respect. It appears to be one of those radical changes, the outcome of feeling rather than of reasonal argument, which in history have proved to be irreversible.

No one could say now the kind of things concerning Hell which to our fathers seemed part of the very texture of their Christian belief. There is no doubt they said them very effectively and with some bearing upon righteousness. They drove men away from evil and towards the altars of repentance by the direct appeal to fear. Much must be forgiven them on this account.

It is impossible to read the sermons, say of John Wesley or of Jonathan Edwards, without feeling that they were the expressions of men who were terribly sincere, and who felt justified in the use of such an instrument by the amendment of life which followed it. A doctrine which secured such salutary results seemed manifestly to be of God. Small wonder that they amplified its use, giving the rein to their imagination, developing vast descriptive power and cogent appeal to the conscience, with insistence upon the uncertainty of life and the necessity for immediate moral decision. Some of us who can look back to days when such preaching was still common, however much our point of view may have changed, are bound to pay tribute to its effectiveness. We are not altogether untouched by envy as we face our harder task of enforcing righteousness amongst a generation which seems largely to have lost the fear of God.

But it is obvious that for one reason or another there has been a climatic change. There is not now, in the minds of men, the substratum of ideas to which the preaching of our fathers could make appeal. Were Wesley or Edwards to proclaim to-day in London the convictions concerning Hell which were so mighty in their own time, they would only seem to be raving. One fancies they would be too wise to persist in it, for the objective of these good men was righteousness, and

it would not take them long to discover that such preaching defeated their laudable end.

It would not be merely that the unrighteous refused to be convinced, but that the lovers of righteousness—of whom there are not fewer now than then—would be shocked in their very conscience and wounded in their very souls.

For the thought of a God who could afflict with endless and unavailing torment the souls of men who in this brief and perplexing span of mortal life had disobeyed His commandment has grown intolerable to all thoughtful people.

I do not know that anything more need be said. We are up against something elemental and unalterable. I am not foolish enough to suggest that men can decide the operations of the Divine Will by a mere popular vote. I disagree with those who vote "Hell" out of existence. I shall explain my reasons presently. But for the moment I am considering in quite a pragmatic way the value of the doctrine of Hell as an instrument of righteousness, and I lay down the principle that men cannot be beneficially swayed by what seems to them untrue, unreasonable and unjust. If there be any value in this doctrine for human conduct it must be restated in a way that reverses these fundamental categories.

The doctrine was effective in the hands of our

fathers precisely because it seemed true, reasonable and just. It was severe, but then God had a right to be severe seeing He was All-powerful and All-holy. It was reasonable because God had granted a revelation which was miraculously attested and commonly believed. Only the inveterately contumacious could harden their hearts against it. It was just, because man's own heart condemning his own sins, it was to be supposed that the judgments of the All-just would be severer still. Who could contemn the counsel of the Most High?

But this is not the world of thought in which we actually live. By no possibility can we return to it. That is why the old-fashioned doctrine of Hell is singularly ineffective. Its severity has passed the point of compulsion.

But it is not merely that it fails because of its severity. Life has not lost for us the aspect of sternness. Anything rather than that is the case with us. Our current literature is terrible in its pessimism, in its declaration concerning vast processes, entirely without mercy, of which we are said to be the sport, and in its negation of the tender Providence and sacrificial Love of God which for our fathers mitigated their awful doctrine of Hell. If severity were all that were involved we have more materials to our hand than they had for interpreting religion in sombre terms.

But the revolt against this old doctrine has something nobler in its heart than a yearning for softness. It perceives that the character of God cannot be saved if such ideas persist. Its ideas of the Divine Sovereignty have been elevated through sorrow. Along with increasing humaneness in the realms of human and animal life, it has been constrained to exalt its moral sense to the very throne of God.

Personally, I feel that behind that movement is the everlasting Divine Spirit, who through all the centuries has led men up from darkness into increasing light. According to the deepest principle of the Christian faith we must become "Men of Sorrows," before the fuller light of the love of God can break in upon us.

Now what are we to say concerning the doctrine of Hell, which in its older form has grown obsolete?

I find my starting point in George Eliot's "Adam Bede." That honest young carpenter was comparing two preachers from whom he had received impressions —Mr. Ryde and Mr. Irwine. Mr. Ryde was a "doctrinal" preacher; Mr. Irwine talked about life as men lived it. Mr. Ryde was said to be "spiritual," since he talked much about the doctrines; Mr. Irwine was suspect upon this ground. "Mrs. Poyser used to say—you know she would have her word about everything—she said, Mr. Irwine was like a good meal o' victual, you were the better for him without thinking on it, and Mr.

Ryde was like a dose of physic, he gripped you and worrited you, and after all he left you much the same."

Adam Bede put it this way when he was asked whether Mr. Ryde's sermons were not more spiritual than Mr. Irwine's.

"Eh, I knowna. He preached a deal about doctrines. But I've seen pretty clear ever since I was a young 'un, as religion's something else besides doctrines and notions. *I look at it as if the doctrines was like finding names for your feelings.*"

The sane young carpenter in the hands of a great novelist, has hit upon a sound principle of interpretation. By far the greatest number of our modern religious difficulties derive from the idea of "*revealed*" religion. Organized Christianity is built upon the assumption that an infallible revelation has been granted to mankind. It was said to be contained in the Holy Scriptures. The Church, in the view of High Catholics, whether Roman or other, is the equally inspired interpreter of this infallible revelation. When Protestantism repudiated the claim of the Church it maintained and even emphasized that of the Bible. Thus, organized Christianity is still trying to stand, however falteringly, upon the idea of an assured revelation, committed to writing, which only needed to be understood to be placed beyond doubt.

Hence the interminable discussions upon the meaning of scripture, the attempts to harmonize the con-

ceptions lying behind words like Sheol, Hades and Gehenna, the anxious balancing of shades of meaning in the Greek word "aionion," or everlasting or eternal.

It has become clear that the Biblical meanings are not identical. They shew the marks of development. The earliest idea of the abode of the dead is not, and cannot be, in our thoughts to-day. But it is certainly in the Bible. The dead went to Sheol, a definite place below the surface of the earth where, ghosts of their real selves, they yet retained material form. Sheol was a barren dread, not an eager hope.

Resurrection is the biblical word. It is still the current religious expression and it need not be changed. But the ideas associated with it in its earliest use are changed, and radically changed within the covers of the Bible itself. At first they are not separable from the body, men simply come to life again; but St. Paul has travelled so far that he expressly declares that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. In his view, the resurrection is not the old flesh restored but is as different from the old as new grain is from the sown seed.

To Jesus, the whole transaction hardly involves the body at all. It is no more than the casting off of an old garment. Men have eternal life already when they are in right relations with God; they have its contrary already when they are divorced in mind and spirit from God.

I believe we have revealed religion in the Bible, but it is absurd to argue that it is in fixed and unalterable form. No sound exponent can at least avoid the necessity of testing the revelation by the touchstone of Christ.

Outside the covers of the Bible, in the trampling centuries, we have the same onward surge of opinion. The preachers of an earlier day cared not from whence they took their texts, and having taken them, they explained them out of their own mental stock of current ideas.

God forbid that all the ideas should persist. Hear, for instance, the comment of a certain monkish chronicler when John Wyclif died, smitten with palsy: "On the feast of the passion of St. Thomas of Canterbury, John Wyclif, the organ of the devil, the enemy of the Church, the idol of heretics, the image of hypocrites, the restorer of schism, the storehouse of lies, the sink of flattery, being struck by the judgment of God was seized with a palsy . . . and that mouth which was to have spoken huge things against God and His Saints and Holy Church was miserably drawn aside . . . his tongue was speechless, and his head shook, showing plainly that the curse which God had thundered forth against Cain was also inflicted upon him."

Would you trust an exposition of Hell to a mind that could think that way, or to a generation which

could tolerate it? For them it was "just as if Jesus had never lived, as if Jesus had never died."

Now, when the average man declares roundly his disbelief in Hell, you may be sure he has some antiquated visualization, some purblind description in his mind. That kind of Hell he ought to repudiate. The pity is that he was ever asked to accept it in the name of religion. But then, religion has had to grow, and growth is a signal mercy of God. Far greater than a fixed revelation, which would defeat itself because the mind of men is not fixed, or if it could fix it, would be as if an acorn were planted in an iron pot—infinitely greater, I say, is an abiding experience which explains itself anew in accordance with a growing revelation.

It is time to come back to the principle stated by Adam Bede: "I look at it as if the doctrines was like finding names for your feelings."

Men have always had "Hell" in their "feelings." That is why they keep stating it in their doctrines. The man who repudiates it absolutely has either had a shallow experience, or is not true to the experience he has had. I will indicate him as one who will find it. He may never change his location; he will find it beneath his hat and his jacket. He will find it here before he dies, and when he has crossed the river of death he will discover that by no trick of legerdemain has it disappeared. For Hell is as permanent as the mind of man. The "real" Hell is not capable of external description;

it is the thing that every man knows. Time may change our interpretations but it does not change our constitution.

I believe in Hell as I believe in Man. I know that he does not escape the consequences of his wrong-doing until he has paid "the very last mite." And I believe in Man as I believe in God, "who hath not dealt with us after our sins nor rewarded us according to our iniquities, but as the heaven is higher than the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him."

THE PAINS OF HELL

By

G. HAY MORGAN

THE PAINS OF HELL

By

G. Hay Morgan

THROUGHOUT the generations of man there has been a widespread hope—and fear—amounting too often to a faith that "This life of mortal breath" is not the end of all things; that for the spirit of man there is a persistence of being and personality which obviously does not pertain to his body. From every tomb which has been recently opened there has poured forth abundant evidence of this faith in the most ancient representatives of our race. At the present time the minds of all are turning with renewed interest to the discussion of the possibilities of this after-life. All religions teach that in this after-life the consequences of our conduct in this present sphere will go with us, and that good conduct will issue in happiness and evil in misery and pain. It is within the memory of many of us—how the Christian preachers of four or five decades ago painted in such lurid colours the flames of Eternal punishment in Hell that many found it difficult to recover from the horror inspired in us. It was literal material fire and in it the wicked would be tormented for ever and ever. I remember one whose favourite and

oft repeated appeal to the sinners in his rural congregation took this form: "You will burn in Hell for as many years as there are kernels of wheat in a sown field of thirty acres—and *then* you will be no nearer the end." Even so, however, I recollect, as a boy, overhearing a shrewd old woman say that she did not think the preachers believed half they said about Hell. If they did, they would go mad at the thought of what awaited so many of their kind.

Thanks to the spread of more scientific methods of thought—and perhaps also to the growth of Christian Charity this type of expression is fast disappearing—if, indeed, it has not entirely gone. Truth is Eternal; that does not change: Sin is as deadly, and the consequences of sin as terrible as they ever were. But we look at the whole question from a different angle and express our beliefs in a different way.

What is Hell? It is the condition or the state of the Spirit suffering the agony of remorse for wrong done, and good left undone in this life. If it is the spirit which suffers—it is clear that the pains are not material or caused by material means—the anguish must be of a spiritual nature. It may be asked: Will not the material body be resurrected from the grave and then be capable of experiencing material pains? The body is composed of chemical elements which in the process of decay or combustion return to the earth from which they sprang. When one contemplates the

millions of millions of bodies which have thus been returned into dust, it is difficult to believe that each of these bodies will be able to claim its old particles and reform itself into the individual body it once was. I do not think we can argue from the resurrection of Jesus Christ, because His body knew no decay and the circumstances were totally different from those which must apply to the rest of mankind; but the Scriptures tell us that His risen body was so different from that which His followers had seen before the Crucifixion that they did not know Him. Is it not possible that this new body was a pure emanation of His Spirit and character—that He was "clothed upon" with a spiritual body? And as the disciples had never truly known His Spirit—so now they did not know the body which was the true outward expression of that spirit. Further, this new body was quite independent of the laws which govern matter. It was this fact which convinced Peter and John when they looked into the empty tomb—not the fact that it was empty, but the obvious manner in which it had been vacated. They saw the linen clothes lying and the napkin that had been about His head folded in a place apart. In other words the winding sheet had not been unwound, but still lay in the position as though a body were inside it; and the turban had not been unfolded but lay folded in the place where the head had been. They knew as they looked that Christ had risen regardless of the linen clothes—a

spiritual body free from the necessity of bursting or unwinding any material bonds. John speaking of, and for himself says: "he saw and believed." Similarly this spiritual body appeared in rooms the doors of which had been carefully locked—and disappeared at will from the sight of those who beheld Him. To return to ourselves—I am not anxious for the continuance of my material body. It is the resultant of the labours, deprivations, sins and virtues of my progenitors—it is by no means a perfect body and I cannot make it so. Some of us are halt and maimed, deaf and blind, deformed and dwarfed, all through no fault of our own. I think the spirit will out of its own nature clothe itself. "God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him." The fine soul of the Apostle Paul will not appear in the diminutive and diseased frame which the Greeks and Romans knew, but in a body born of his great and beautiful spirit. This is the "spiritual body," which will take the place of the "natural body," as he declared in that eloquent description which he gave to the Corinthian Church, "For this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." No: body or no body the pains of Hell are of a spiritual and not material character.

What sort of pains will they be? I think they will be of the kind which we suffer to-day. When I do something which is not approved by the highest court of my being—my Conscience—I feel dissatisfied with

myself, ashamed of myself, annoyed with myself. If the censure passed on my conduct by this court is very severe my misery may deepen into despair—almost to madness. As Shakespeare makes Richard III say on the eve of Bosworth Field:

"My conscience hath a thousand several tongues
And every tongue brings in a several tale
And every tale condemns me for a villain
Perjury, Perjury in the high'st degree
Murder stern murder in the dir'st degree
All several sins, all us'd in each degree
Throng to the bar, crying all Guilty! Guilty!"

This is Hell.

Take the case of a man who has lived a double life. He has enjoyed the way of sin. He has known all the time that it was wrong, but he persuaded himself that if it was hidden from wife and family and friends it did not matter to them. Others who had done the same had suffered exposure and degradation; but not he. None should find him out. He would take good care of that. And so he continued for years. Then comes the day of awakening. Sin had been indulged while conscience slept, or at any rate had been semi-comatose—but now the highest court of his being is wide awake and calls him to account. He sees the horror of the thing he has done: the delightful dalliance seems loathsome when he considers the deceit and

duplicity—the overwhelming of mind and soul by the senses—the anguish of this man can only be described in one phrase—it is Hell.

Take the parables of Jesus Christ from which, in the main, the notion of a material Hell has sprung, viz. The Parable of Dives and Lazarus and that of the Last Judgment. They are but parables and, while veiling in allegory a spiritual truth, were never intended to be a literary description of the actual punishment of a sinful soul. The truth inculcated is so remarkable that it is strange the preachers lost sight of it in the glare of the material flames. It is this: The rich man in the first parable and the wicked multitude segregated on the left hand of the Judge in the other are consigned to Hell not because they were murderers or thieves or liars or had committed all the crimes of the calendar, but because they were so selfish as to neglect the poor and needy at their doors. Day after day Dives passed by the sick, starving beggars who lay in the portico of his mansion; but so intent was he on his own selfish pleasures that he took no notice of Lazarus—gave him neither bite nor sup, and made not the smallest effort to relieve his painful necessity. The spirit of Dives was selfish and proud. The *spirit* was wrong, and when the eyes of conscience are opened it is the spirit which suffers remorse. Charles Dickens—with that keen scent which he always shows for discovering the true psychology of human conduct—speaks of

the wailing lamentations of the spirits who wander hither and thither in restless haste and moaning as they go, "the misery with them all was, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power forever." And later on in the story, when Scrooge sees his former self sitting in the deserted schoolhouse, neglected and forlorn, he cried: "Poor boy! I wish —— but it's too late now." "What's the matter?" asked the guiding spirit. "Nothing, nothing. There was a boy singing a Christmas carol at my door last night. I should like to have given him something, that's all."

In His teaching and conduct Jesus Christ was lenient and sympathetic with those who went wrong through bodily passion; but he uses terms of the severest condemnation of those whose spirit is mean, selfish and hypocritical. That may be because the woman stained with shame is often generous in spirit to a fault; and the company loving winebibber is so free that he forgets himself altogether. It may be that when the body is gone these qualities of the spirit will appear untarnished by the earth. But the sins of the spirit warp it and dwarf it. It was of such a shrunken, shrivelled spirit creeping away into the eternities that God said: "Thou fool."

Surely in these things we may find some clue as to what the pains of Hell are like. The spirit—no longer worried on the one hand, or shielded on the other by

the body; unweighted or unmitigated by surrounding circumstances of wealth and society or the cramping influences of poverty—unclad and alone it has to contemplate its sins, its cruelty, its selfishness, and all the time with a clearer vision of what might have been.

"I sent my soul through the Invisible,
Some letter of that After-life to spell:
And by and by my soul return'd to me,
And answer'd 'I myself am Heaven and Hell.'"

Is this consonant with the Love of God? The answer is that God is also Righteous and Just. While it was the custom of a former generation to paint the face of the Divine Being with a perpetual frown—we have gone to the other extreme and given it an expression of a feeble, pliant go-as-you-please Parent.

"He's a Good Fellow, and 'twill all be well." Better realize at once that the Law of Right is His law. If we obey it we find peace; if we refuse to do so we must suffer the consequences. We cannot bribe or bully, coax or coerce Him into the adoption of a course that is not Right. The poisoner who calmly plots the death of wife and friends not in passion but in cold blood. The scoundrel who sucks the vitality of the poor, or sells the virtue of girls to make money for himself. The diabolical human who delights to undermine the reputation and character of others. How can they escape the consequences of their conduct? The consciences of

even such may awake, and what a horrible awakening it will be! "Whatsoever a man soweth, *that*—shall he also reap."

What then of the Love of God? It heals the effects of past sins, and it strengthens the soul to overcome future temptation. It cannot begin to operate on the individual until he has repented and resolved on reform. Even then the effect of past wrongdoing is not obliterated in a moment. It is the slow process of a healing wound. The Father welcomed home the repentant prodigal—put the best robe on him and surrounded him with all possible aids to restoration. But was there no remorse in the heart covered by the best robe? No self-condemnation for the folly and the ingratitude of the past? I trow there was. That son experienced pains akin to those of Hell, and it was only gradually in the association of the Father's love and in abiding communion with Him that those pains were assuaged. All this the Father's love could not prevent, perhaps on account of its educative effect on the son, would not prevent if he could. That brings us to the question:

Are the pains to be experienced for ever and ever?

The view of most Christian teachers is that at the moment of the death of the body the doom of the spirit is finally and irrevocably fixed for ever. There are many instances where the language of the New

Testament supports this view. But not universally so, and one could quote passages which appear to indicate that while the pains of Hell are age-long or eternal they need not be for ever. Look at it from a rational standpoint. The assumption is that the sinful soul *lives* after the death of the body. We cannot conceive life in a static moral condition. Change or movement is the sign of life. The living soul must grow better or worse in that future state. Jesus Christ told the malefactor who was crucified beside him, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." It is impossible to think that the soul of Christ and that of the malefactor would continue for ever on the same plane. Paradise must be the starting-point, and it looks as though there must be a chance of reformation ahead for the malefactor. We are told elsewhere that at this time Jesus Christ went to preach to the spirits of the departed. Preach what? What, but hope of a better state if certain conditions are fulfilled. We have to remember that there is no such thing as a perfect soul at the moment of death. The best will have to undergo some purifying experience, of the same kind, though not the same in degree, as those who are called sinners. I cannot but believe that in the nature of things there will be an opportunity for an upward development of the soul for all. I say an "opportunity." This may even there be rejected, and the soul, instead of improving, may

degenerate still further. There would, however, be an end to this latter process and that end would be total extinction. "The wages of sin is death." "The soul that sinneth it shall die."

Surely that benevolent will for our good which we call the Love of God, cannot cease to operate merely by the expiration of the last breath from the body. There is some virtue in the worst of us, and if there be repentance for the wrong, God's love begins to heal the effect of the past, and helps to cherish the spark of goodness for the future. Who knows but that this joy of overcoming may not be an important factor in the bliss of the next world as it is here? Who knows but that the victory over sin which even angels do not know (because they have experienced no temptation) may be the Crown of Eternal Life, and the repentant sinner will know and understand the Love of God as a sinless person (if such there be) never could. It may be that this is the explanation of the saying of Jesus Christ: "Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance."

I am aware that all this is surmising. We can but guess—we cannot dogmatize. Yes, we can also hope; and I am disposed to heed the advice of Adelaide Anne Procter when she says:

"And judge none lost: but wait and see,
With hopeful pity not disdain.
The depth of the abyss may be
The measure of the heights of pain
And love and glory that may raise
This soul to God in after days."

THE PAGAN'S HELL

By

PROFESSOR IRWIN EDMAN

THE PAGAN'S HELL

By

PROFESSOR IRWIN EDMAN

THIS is an essay on Hell, written from the standpoint of those thousands of informed contemporaries to whom God, Heaven and Hell in the traditional sense, have no meaning—save as the expression of a mythology which science and conscience both forbid them to believe. For the purposes of this article it is exactly as if Christianity with its threats and consolations, its tenderness and cruelties, had never been. Yet not quite as if they had never been. For even the most realistic and the most religiously disenchanted in the Western World have had their imaginations touched in childhood, and their deep-lying moral convictions shaped and coloured irretrievably by the poetry and human insight of a theology which now, as adults, they cannot literally or even remotely believe. The image if not the existence of God stays with us. We stir familiarly at the name of a Heaven for which our astronomy forbids us a local habitation. We do not credit, but we still can imagine, the furies and the fires of Hell.

Liberal theology has, everybody knows, had trouble

enough trying to define a God at once acceptable to the modern intellect and vivid to the modern imagination. It has had a parlous enough time trying to describe and to people a Heaven that would meet at once our logic and our needs. But at Hell it has drawn the line. That terrifying real Hell with which Jonathan Edwards picturesquely frightens his readers, is intense enough to the contemporary imagination; but it is on a hundred grounds impossible to the modern mind. It is incredible to our knowledge of astronomy, and revolting to our sense of justice. Liberal theology reduces God to a formula, Heaven to a soft synonym for perfection. It has completely ceased to talk about Hell.

To those, free from the necessity for indulging in apologetics or for reconciling what they know with what they wish they could still believe, God and Heaven are more acceptable by far than the obsolete horrors of Hell. The God of Thunders and of Battles may be translated into a thousand significant meanings. He is Love; he is Aspiration; he is Ideality. He is man's image of his own good will, as Heaven is an objectification of his own good hopes. God becomes the metaphor for the humanitarian intention, Heaven the metaphor for the humanitarian ideal. But with Hell, the free mind of the modern pagan, like the compromising mind of the modern theologian, can do nothing. Hell is too definite an image and a moral heritage to be softened into anything modern and mild. God and

Heaven are still lovable though dubious symbols, whatever be the doubts with which we approach their reality. But, to our sensitive modern ears, Hell has become a meaningless chimera or an intolerable savagery. If religion be, what to so many moderns it is, the poetry of human aspiration, Hell becomes completely impossible even in a metaphorical sense. It cannot be prettified or romanticized. If it could be, it would not be Hell.

Yet the free mind—if it recognizes the symbolic and revealing poetry of its symbols of God and of Heaven—is both dishonest and inconsistent in refusing to recognize the permanent significance, the inescapable moral reality of Hell. The refusal in the modern imaginative treatments of religion to recognize the irreducible meaning of the concept of Hell, is a testimony to the sentimentalism of minds that pride themselves on being void of any soft illusions. Heaven is the picture of our hopes and God the name for our ideal aspirations. We will not face the possibility that we have other than ideal hopes, and that in more than one direction our hopes are inevitably damned. Hell, which is the eternal objectification of things hoped for—in vain. Only the sentimental imagine that science and the machine have banished unutterable horror and unavoidable doom from our lives. We are further than ever, perhaps, from Heaven; but we come as near as ever to knowing Hell.

For after all the contemporary imagination draws its materials for the notion of Hell whence the imagination of man has always drawn it, from human experience. Heaven has been a traditionally faint picture of joys more unearthly—and more thin—than any known on earth, whereas the material fires and tortures of Hell have been simply the acute physical metaphors of those cruelties, deprivations, horrors and dooms which men have known on earth. To be in Hell has been to experience eternal torment, and there have been, as there are still, human pains which, though they last but a brief period, are eternal in their character and their bitterness. To be in Hell has traditionally been conceived as being deprived for ever of one's single saving Good. Our theology may have changed or vanished, but the conditions which generated that terrible conception are with us—as they always will be—still. To be in Hell has meant in the past to live in another world of horror without the remotest hope of redemption. Hell as a geographical location may be abolished; but the modern pagan without a creed knows very well on occasion in his own life, in observation of the lives of others, that it is impossible here and now in this secular and transient life to live without hope of redemption. To be in Hell has, in the theological tradition, been to live without vision of the Good. How many for whom the old canons are abolished and who have no new ones to live

by, know the horror—blank and paralyzing—of living without a vision of a Good which could give a meaning to their lives?

Traditionally, Hell has been the abode of lost souls. One does not need to seek the abode of such doomed creatures in another world. The actual contemporary world is the clear demesne of any number of such. Must one be a Christian—even of the modern sort, timid, confused and apologetic—to have known these experiences? Must one believe in the traditional God, or in the traditional doctrine of sin, to have known Hell, here and now, or to have observed it? Anyone not given to sentimental and evasive raptures, may be forgiven for doubting it. It is easy to doubt God and His Heaven. One need only live without them, as St. Augustine long ago observed; one need only live at all to recognize the true and inescapable lineaments of Hell. Jonathan Edwards filled Hell with searing fire and corrosive pain. No preacher would dare to threaten a modern congregation, both soft and incredulous, with these. But Dante, as has so often been observed, could scarcely exaggerate or invent physical horrors which in some analogous form human beings have not known. It may be retorted that Dante was living in a brutal world, where flagellation, burning and the rack were a routine part of life. Those have, it is true, gone from the calendar and geography of our environment. But pain, brutal and final, has not gone from our lives.

A pagan modern, suffering from cancer, knows from what materials the Inferno was compounded. We have become too polite or too sentimentally exuberant to keep our eyes focussed on those pains, eternal in their quality if not in their duration, which science has not banished from our world.

But even in the orthodox tradition, physical pain has been, as it were, the comparatively vulgar outer symbol of that inner spiritual horror in which the true meaning and status of Hell was to be found. The worst pain of Hell has been, even in the orthodox version, the deprivation of eternal Good. That this deprivation lasted endless time was less important than that at any moment such deprivation was and seemed eternal. So Hell, in the modern world, may well be said, by magnificent irony, to consist partly in the fact that our new knowledge and our new freedom have robbed us and deprived us of a saving Good. Each soul in its privacy and isolation may still know the terror of that deprivation of some central Good upon which its heart, its desire, the core and direction of its life are set. One knows, quite apart from theology, from one's own experience or the experience of one's friends, how the deprivation of a love or some central object of ambition may constitute the very climate and poisoned atmosphere of Hell. But our generation has suffered something worse than the individual privations of individual lives. What is the complaint of so

many of our contemporary disillusionists but this: the old creeds have died, or are dying, and with them the Good which they enshrined and the hope of which gave life a meaning and existence a goal. If to live deprived of all possibility of the Good is Hell, then the creedless members of our disillusioned generation are in Hell much of the time. Not the pains of hellfire were the worst, but the very essence of Hell, in the old tradition, was to be without Heaven and without God. Surely many of our generation know what that means. By reading themselves out of the ancient conviction they have demonstrated some of their essential truths, that he who is without a God, without a Good, is damned; that he who has no Heaven to look to, is in Hell. The fool hath said in his heart, "There is no God," and he in so saying has found himself in the abyss.

Again, to be in Hell has meant to live without hope of redemption. In the olden time that hopelessness might often be experienced in anticipation in the shape of an unbearable conviction of sin or the tortured persuasion that one had committed the unpardonable one. Or later, in that ugly Sadistic theology that goes by the name of Calvinism, one might guess, to one's consternation, that one was predestined to damnation. Our language has changed. We do not speak of, or any longer believe, in the conviction of sin; we have ceased,

too, to mutter about the sin against the Holy Ghost. Many would not insult that God in whom they no longer believe by thinking that He would predestine infants to eternal torment. But we have simply given other and more secular names to the same intimate and ineluctable facts. We are likely now in the current jargon to speak of an inferiority complex. But what is that in extreme form but a conviction of sin, of a soul bent toward nothingness, a vessel of corruption, an engine self-directed to destruction? And those who have known themselves or others with whom that sense has become a paralyzing torment know what a very literal Hell it can be. We seek psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, not priests and plenary indulgences, to be saved. But while the conviction lasts we are in Hell, indeed. And one needs no Augustine or Aquinas to prove it. Those freed from traditional Christian preconceptions, can make nothing but mystery or mummery out of the sin against the Holy Ghost. But if that sin means still, what in essence it has always meant, the sin against the integrity, profound and uninfringible, of one's own nature and one's own being, the sin is not unknown to moderns, nor the hellfire of pain that goes with it. Sin, in the tradition, brought its damnation with it. It was not simply that the soul was punished in the next world. Sin destroyed it in this. And so still with the sin against the integrity of one's own being. One pays for the lie in one's life by a

thousand forms of disorganization and despair. The psychiatric clinics and sanitaria are filled with modern persons who have never thought about the Holy Ghost and yet have sinned against it none the less. And, as in the tradition, they are—and irretrievably—in Hell. They are doomed, and doomed by the sin against their own being. What matter that the word sin is out of fashion, or that we have other more medical words for damnation? The fact and its consequences are still here. Nor is it only in these spectacular cases that come into the hands of psychiatrists that the soul living against its own nature suffers. There are secret and unconfessed hells, populated privately by each individual whom wealth or fame or some subtler worldliness has destroyed in soul. The sinner in Hell could not call on God because God's ear was against him. The modern tormented ones are in a Hell they do not believe in and believe in no God upon whom they could call.

Hell, to take the last mentioned of the traditional characters of that traditional relay of damnation, is the abode of lost souls. What generation ever boasted a greater number? What age had more individuals who did not know where they were going or felt themselves lost utterly, beyond the hope of any salvage? What age ever had more persons who could not, hard though many of them try, give a meaning to their lives, or attribute one, however desperately they try, to the world in which they live or the actions which they do?

They wander up and down on the earth and to and fro in it, but they sense themselves lost as deeply and irretrievably as any Christian sinner. They are damned not in terms of an unbelievable mythology. Their damnation consists partly and precisely in the fact that they no longer have a comforting mythology in which they can believe.

Hell, indeed, has ceased to be credible as a section of another world—a fiery, unending prison deep below the surface of the earth, where foul demons, once "sons of the morning," goad the writhing damned with physical prongs and spiritual upbraidings and breathe with them maliciously the stench of that foul inferno. But only the bovine or the dishonest would deny its reality in the diurnal life lived on the indubitable earth under the sky, so actual, so uncaring and so blue. Paolo and Francesca, tossed about in Dante's Inferno by the eternalized gusts of their own guilty passion, are no more lost than those swept by confused alarms of struggle and flight on the battlefield of the tormented contemporary imagination. Dante populated Hell among other things with those who had sulked in the sun. Many moderns are thus sulking. They cannot bear to delight in even the casual enjoyments possible in an existence at once transient and fatal. They are, like Paolo and Francesca, swept for ever by the winds of their own chaos or wallowing eternally in the mud of their own disillusion. They cannot even enjoy that sun

which for them no longer declares the glory of God. Of all the apparatus of the Christian tradition Hell has been most smiled at by the modern. Yet Hell is of all the theological notions that which empirically he knows best.

But Hell, it may be contested in the orthodox tradition, meant punishment for sin prescribed at once by God's justice and His love. The latter-day pagan cannot believe that any physical or spiritual pains he suffers are the deliberate artifice of a God who insists on damning the unworthy in the interests of those faithful whom He loves. To the sceptical contemporary it would seem questionable that a God of Love would have created a world at all, much less the kind of world in which we live. Nor do the individual catastrophes we suffer, or those ills and frustrations which as a race we are heir to, seem to have anything to do with justice. That child, or that friend of ours cut off brutally and meaninglessly, seems to illustrate no law, or justice, nor any intelligible act of love. Certainly if Hell for us be compounded of the worst evils that can and do befall us, there is no moral meaning to most of them. The sin of stupidity or ignorance has its terrible consequences. The sin of being born at all with the paradox of hopes in a universe not made to sustain them, has its torments and its dooms prescribed for us. The Inferno of war, of poverty, of sickness of soul and body are the penalties we pay for our human

ignorance and stupidities. They are just only in the sense that it is just that a given A should follow a given B. They are not just as men have conceived justice to each other, or as in the past they have imagined God's justice to His creatures. Nor by any stretch of the word's meaning, can our terrors and privations be construed as the working of God's providential love.

The most permanent characteristic of Hell that has remained for us is, to use the old metaphors still, that we can no longer live or have our conversation in Heaven. There is a mediæval tradition of respectable origin (John Scotus Erigena gives partial expression to it) that one of the reasons the fallen angels could not have remained in Heaven was that they would not have been happy there. Unless the will of the soul is one with the will of God, Heaven is not peace, but torment; it is turned into an identity with Hell. Our knowledge and our sophistication have made it more difficult for us to talk seriously about identifying ourselves with the will of God. But that very knowledge and sophistication have taken from us the birthright of living with spontaneous joy among those felicities which might constitute the partial materials of an earthly Paradise. We have become so tormented and confused by disillusion about our place in nature and our own human nature that whatever of Heaven is possible on earth is lost for us. We are like the fallen angels, incapable of living at peace with possible joys.

We see ourselves as an accident, troubled and paradoxical, in a universe that does not care for or even know the accident or paradox we are. We see our most tender or most grandiose ideals in terms of their trivial physiological origins or their certain physical extinction. We can believe in love as little as we believe in God; we can believe in ourselves as little as we believe in Heaven. One of the most agonizing torments of the traditional Hell was the mockery of the friends who reminded the damned of what they might have been and what happiness they might have had. Our cynics and our scientists are our contemporary friends. They remind us of the gross glandular facts at the basis of our ecstacies; they goad us with the emptinesses of a world that might once for us have had beauty and meaning. The fallen angels were in Hell because they could not have enjoyed Heaven. We are in Hell because we cannot enjoy earth or ourselves.

Calvinism is represented often and justly as an unhappy doctrine because it insisted that so many humans were predestined to destruction. But there is a forgotten happy side to Calvinism. After all there were some who were to be saved. Thus, too, in our world there are some born full of grace—born, as William James put it, with a bottle of champagne to their credit. They can face personal disaster or recognize the futility and doom that hover, a fatal cloud, above the sunniest existence, and yet retain their sweetness and their faith

in their own or in humanity's future. They can point with radiance to all that science and the machine may do to mitigate illness and poverty, all that intelligence may do to mitigate conflict and war. They are full of grace if not of truth. These alone do not know what Hell is. But for the rest of us, we may claim no longer to know God or believe in Heaven. Hell, filled with our foundered hopes and wrecked illusions, our agonies and our fated ends, is with us still. The old theology built perhaps weakly when it constructed mansions in the sky. It plumbed to the very subsoil of human experience when it dug the foundations of Hell.

School of Theology
at Claremont

200

BT834 .W4
What is hell? /

BT
834
W4

What is hell? By Dean W. R. Inge, Sir Oliver Lodge, Abbot Butler [and others] ... New York and London, Harper & brothers, 1930.

1. Hell.

CCSC/ej

A10776